THE BLINDED EYE

500 YEARS OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

BY

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About the Book

The first draft of this book was composed by Merryl Wyn Davies (Kuala Lumpur) and Ziauddin Sardar (London). After discussions, it was modified by Ashis Nandy in Delhi and later, by Claude Alvares in Goa. The final draft was prepared by Claude Alvares incorporating detailed final comments from the other three authors.

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Introduction

On the morning of 12th October, 1492, a group of Arawakian Lucayos discovered three ships moored off their island of Guanahani in the Caribbean. Unknown to the Arawaks, the vessels had come from Europe. Leading the first of them was a man named Christopher Columbus.

In such manner, literally overnight, and with great suddenness, was the ominous existence of Europe brought to bear on the consciousness of the people of the Americas.

Six years later, a Portuguese native named Vasco da Gama was permitted to disembark at the port of Calicut on the south coast of India, instituting the direct route from Europe to India via the Cape of Good Hope. A mere two decades after da Gama's successful journey, Ferdinand Magellan, a native of Spain, commenced his voyage to encircle the globe.

Prior to these journeys, the people of the Americas had been known sporadically to other sea-farers from Africa and China and even perhaps to the odd European as well.

In the Asian region, unknown to Europe, widespread voyages in the interests of trade had long been established and become routine among the Asians including the Chinese, and also between Asians and Africans.

The voyages associated with Columbus, da Gama and Magellan were therefore not unprecedented. Their distinguishing character stems rather from their consequences. Had these been known by some miracle of prescience, the Arawaks would have almost certainly attacked the ships, thrown Columbus into the sea and danced with joy while watching him drown. And they would have been more than amply justified in doing so.

The voyages, we know, led to the imposition of a world-view and the installation of a global order through which millions of people, and thousands of other living species, simply lost their rights to exist. Those who survived the holocausts found themselves compelled to order and regulate their lives in tune with the extortionate requirements of the descendants of Columbus, and his spiritual heirs as well. Today they continue to remain subjected to a constant, unrelenting immiserization process that sucks into its vortex increasing numbers every year in the continents of Africa, the two Americas, Australia and Asia including China.

The important point about these consequences is that they were not accidental. We can recall that the conquest of human beings and of nature was commenced and completed first of all within Europe and only thereafter applied as an innovation to the rest of the planet. Nothing that the Portuguese and Spanish did, including the commerce in slaves, was not first tried out on their own citizenry; no design the English attempted to impose on India or North America or Africa was not first attempted on their own countrymen and later, with greater violence, on the Irish and Welsh as well.

What the new voyages attempted now was to impose this world-view in a conscious effort over all the globe. Over the 500 years that have passed since they commenced, the generally unhappy features of the European native, his disturbed thinking, his distorted perception and his spiritually barren cultural objectives have been replicated and duplicated mindlessly in all those places and within all those people on whom he sought to impose himself.

The result has been the re-incarnation of entire nations of people as incomplete and defective Europeans, their only salvation predicated on generous assistance and guidance from the World

Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions and multinational corporations. If in the process they are to be enslaved all over again, as is happening in any event, this is infinitely to be preferred, so say their own economists, to being dead.

Normal beings that we are, we would think the encounter that took place on that morning of October 12, 1492 provided the Christian continent of Europe with an unprecedented opportunity to be finally empirical, to exorcise the Great Lie that it had nurtured and harboured for centuries about Us, the Other - people hitherto beyond its actual touch and reach - and about Nature too; a Lie woven in monstrous and phantasmagoric details, based primarily on the fears, fantasies and demons inhabiting the Western mind from Herodotus to Pliny, and from St. Augustine to Columbus.

But, as we shall presently see, this was an impossibility, given the persisting, endemic blindness in the eye of Europe.

The Dutch cartographer and geographer Gerhardus Mercator, who fixed Columbus' 'discoveries' on the map, called history *Oculus Mundi*, the Eye of the World. Thanks to his map projection, Mercator imprinted the Atlantic centred view of the world in all our minds. His graphic image is a faithful reproduction of the *oculus mundi* forged by Columbus' voyage of 1492. To examine Mercator's map of 1538 is to learn what Columbus unleashed with his trans-Atlantic venture. For the events of 1492, instead of turning out to be an encounter with reality became an extension to a new location, of the West's history and its way of seeing the world. With the forging of a connection between the east and the west, Europe's familiar old images of those outside its frontiers became a truly global framework for thought and action.

The tragedy inaugurated in 1492 was therefore, like any Greek tragedy, inevitable: the salient features of Greek tragedy being its inexorability, its foreordained, predestined horror, the fact that there is no escape. Events work themselves out in blood because that is the way things must be.

Thus the bearers of *oculus mundi* sincerely and consciously thought they were acting for the benefit of the Amerindians and the others when they were hacking, killing, mutilating or enslaving them. That is the enormity; a product in fact of a weird Western

ideology that initially marched straight out of its religious (Christian) world-view and has been merely secularized and scientized in different forms over the past 500 years.

Not unexpectedly, as the deformation in the eye of the West has proceeded, caught perhaps now in a cancerous and fatal stage, the result has been a further endorsing and legitimizing of the Great Lie.

This is not to deny that we have been partly affected as well for the simple reason that we too have been unable to resist the equally self-destructive claims of the Columbus within.

We therefore all find ourselves today trapped in a 'history' that moves in ever-decreasing, ever-constricting, concentric circles. At the epicentre of this tornado is the Great Lie, about the nature of the Other and about the nature of the West, about 'Us' and 'Them' and the relationship of all to nature: what it ought to be, what it has tragically become.

To many, this wholly unconventional reading of the quincentenary past will appear audacious and troubling. We see in it instead the germ of a manifesto, a call to break out of a history that has managed, with some depressing success, not only to strip all not-Western people of their humanity and identity but which threatens to deprive both Us and the West of the creative, liberating means to address the pressing issues of today, particularly the survival of planet Earth and all its living beings.

Them

Christopher Columbus, an itinerant native of Genoa in Italy, was a man on the make, an adventurer in search of advancement in the most conventional manner of his time. The second half of the fifteenth century was a time of recovery and a period of gradually expanding economic activity and steady growth throughout Europe. The great depopulation of the previous century caused by the plague (the 'Black Death') had left plenty of scope and space for new men on the rise in all European societies.

The prosperity of the city of Columbus' birth was founded on its trading links with the Muslim world, and on bulk trade with the Atlantic fringes of Europe. Genoan merchants formed thriving communities throughout the Iberian peninsula and operated networks in Britain, Holland and France. Trading and seafaring were an inseparable part of the Genoan way of life. The dispersed communities of compatriots provided a ready and obvious support system for any young man who, in the time-honoured local fashion, went to sea to make his fortune.

Spain, Portugal and England, before whose monarchs Columbus sought to advance his 'enterprise of the Indies', all had a growing interest in their Atlantic waters: a lively rivalry existed between them for new Atlantic possessions.

Portugal and Spain, in fact, had significant motives behind their Atlantic explorations. Both countries had been within the

orbit of the Muslim world and both had developed a consistent history of implacable hostility to it, despite (perhaps because of) having been part of that world. Indeed, though they were products of Europe's unique experience of being, under the Moorish dispensation, plural societies, they were now determined to expunge that history. Their entry onto the European stage as nations was the result of the *Reconquista*, the rolling back of Muslim control of their territory. Portugal had completed the process in 1249, while Spain achieved its final victory over Granada in January 1492 just three months before the royal warrant for Columbus' voyage was granted.

The Iberian powers were motivated by two aspects of Muslim supremacy that were economically particularly important. The Muslim Levant dominated the trade with the Indies from which came the spices and luxuries that made European life palatable and tolerable. To obtain these goods, whose internal trade was dominated by the merchants of Venice and Genoa, there was an acute need of gold. The gold that underwrote European currencies and trade throughout the Middle Ages came across the Sahara from the riverine goldfields of West Africa to Morocco and thence entered European circulation before passing out again into the Muslim realms further east. As a consequence, the economic trends of the medieval world placed Europe at a disadvantage as a net contributor to the wealth of the Muslim world. In addition to the need for gold, at the precise time Columbus was seeking patronage in Portugal and then Spain, the internal social, political and economic circumstances of these countries also demanded new sources of finance.

Thus, the first expansion beyond Europe's own boundaries was made by the Portuguese who intended to secure control of the trans-Saharan gold routes. They captured Ceuta in 1415, but there was no gold to be discovered in Morocco itself, nor was one foothold sufficient to annex the gold trade. It is probable that Portugal's contact with the Maghrib provided it with useful information about the coast and interior of Africa and triggered the idea of striking nearer to the source of the gold trade and outflanking the long established overland trade network by sea. The Portuguese voyages that edged their way down the coast of Africa were all private ventures, quite often outright piracy, legitimized

by a grander chivalric and hence inevitably crusading motif. Malyn Newitt argues that this was the reality behind the hagiography of that other paragon of the 'age of discovery': Prince Henry the Navigator, of Portugal.

Thus, overturning Muslim dominance in European affairs was a persistent medieval European objective that could legitimize any kind of action. It already had an Atlantic content and meaning even before Columbus entered the fray. In fact, both Portugal and Spain had a developed and thriving settler colonization programme underway in the Atlantic islands: the Azores, Cape Verde and the Canaries.

However, though both countries had such interests, Spain's was the greater. Spain desperately needed some other springboard to leapfrog the already established pattern of Portuguese plans to reach the riches of 'the Indies', a vague term comprising both the underbelly of Muslim Africa and what lay beyond the Muslim lands. ('The Indies' were, in a sense, all that was beyond Europe).

Both Spain and Portugal also had a conceptual and legal framework for such ventures in the form of a series of Papal Bulls that provided the context to European expansion and to Europe's relationship with the non-Christian world. These Bulls allowed the European monarchs to legitimize their activities and to stake their respective claims to possession and rights in the international sphere. The monarchs then subcontracted the pursuit of their vision to their clients. All voyages into Atlantic waters had to be licensed by monarchs: royal warrant was the only means to protect and lay secure claim to whatever marketable resource one might acquire, whatever its nature.

So it should occasion little surprise that there was a remarkable overlap in conception, language and ideas between the terms of appointment Columbus was at such pains to wrest from the Spanish monarchs on his own behalf and what the monarchs of Spain and Portugal sought from the Pope.

The Papal bull *Dum Diversas* of 1452, for instance, earliest in a series of Bulls granted to the Portuguese, defined the conceptual context of Iberia's Atlantic venture. It was similar in conception to the warrant the Spanish Borgia Pope, Alexander VI, granted to Ferdinand and Isabella before Columbus set sail.

Dum Diversas authorized the King of Portugal to attack, conquer and subdue 'Saracens', pagans and other unbelievers who were inimical to Christ; to capture their goods and their territories; to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to transfer their lands and properties to the King of Portugal and his successors. (Even today, the modern state, including the modern Indian state - a heritage of Christian Europe - treats subjects in the same way through 'development'). The Papacy itself in the second half of the fifteenth century may have been an increasingly weak institution. Nevertheless, the Bulls represented the quintessence of European understanding, a function of its essential way of seeing the world.

If the Papal Bulls set the psychopolitical context of Atlantic questing, the geopolitical context was provided by the Crusade - a theme nurtured within the consciousness of Western Christendom since 1099. To the Europe of Columbus' day the Crusades were hardly a thing of the past. Both Spain and Portugal had internalized the convention of the Crusade: it influenced all of Europe's cultural and intellectual products.

As *Dum Diversas* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* make clear, any non-Christian people could be an appropriate target for crusading. Crusades could cover the peoples of the Atlantic islands and Africa as well as the campaigns against the 'pagans' of northern Europe where Chaucer's knight also saw action. Portugal, and later Spain, extended the geographic scope of the Crusade to the Maghrib just as it had previously been extended to a multiplicity of Muslim and even Byzantine areas around the Mediterranean. The crusading imperative, in fact, gained new impetus in the European imagination with the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman empire in 1453.

The Papal bull *Romanus Pontifex* of 1455 specifically credits the Portuguese king with seeking to circumnavigate Africa to make contact with the Indies where, it was hoped, they would find Prester John, a Christian monarch. Throughout the Middle Ages Prester John figured in European literature and was deemed to reside on the other side of the Muslim lands, somewhere out east.

Together with this potential ally, the Bull expected Portugal to prosecute the struggle against the 'Saracen' and other enemies of Christ. In the same year Spain responded to Papal exhortation

for a new Crusade against the Turk by renewing its internal *Reconquista* against Granada, the last Muslim kingdom on the Iberian peninsula.

Into this setting stepped Christopher Columbus, seaman and would-be entrepreneur. The scheme he devised was a novel one: he would outflank the Portuguese initiative by attempting to sail to the Indies westward across the Atlantic Sea. Though in itself his scheme was novel, the over-all conception was just another in a well trod pattern of contemporary undertakings with conventional aims and purposes. Only his plan of action, to get east by a western route, marked him out. (Even the westward route had its antecedents: note the widespread acceptance of islands to the west of the European landmass that could offer both rewards as well as a worthy crusading focus).

A great deal is made of how little we know of Columbus' background and early life. It has remained a rich source of hagiographic speculation, for a larger-than-life figure, sufficiently enigmatic to support contradictory interpretations. Yet the little that is known is more than sufficient to render him, his career, ideas and aspirations wholly unremarkable in the context of his times.

A practical apprenticeship at sea, in the waters of the Atlantic powers of Europe, is all that was necessary to set the scene for Columbus' career. The only additional character trait required was a lively interest in the literary sources of his time. We know what books Columbus read. We know that though not formally schooled, he read the most representative of the conventional available sources. Together both qualifications explain why he conceived his particular Grand Design; how he sought to realise it; what he, and those who followed in his footsteps as well as those more loosely connected with those activities, thought about his endeavour and its outcome.

Despite this, the legends have remained in circulation. What every schoolchild knows about 1492, for instance, is elegantly summed up in the lyrics of Cole Porter:

> They all laughed at Christopher Columbus
> when he said the world was round.

Popular folklore sees Columbus as a dreamer, an idealist and a visionary, to be contrasted with his sailors who even feared they

might fall off the edge of a flat earth if they sailed too far westwards across the Atlantic Ocean.

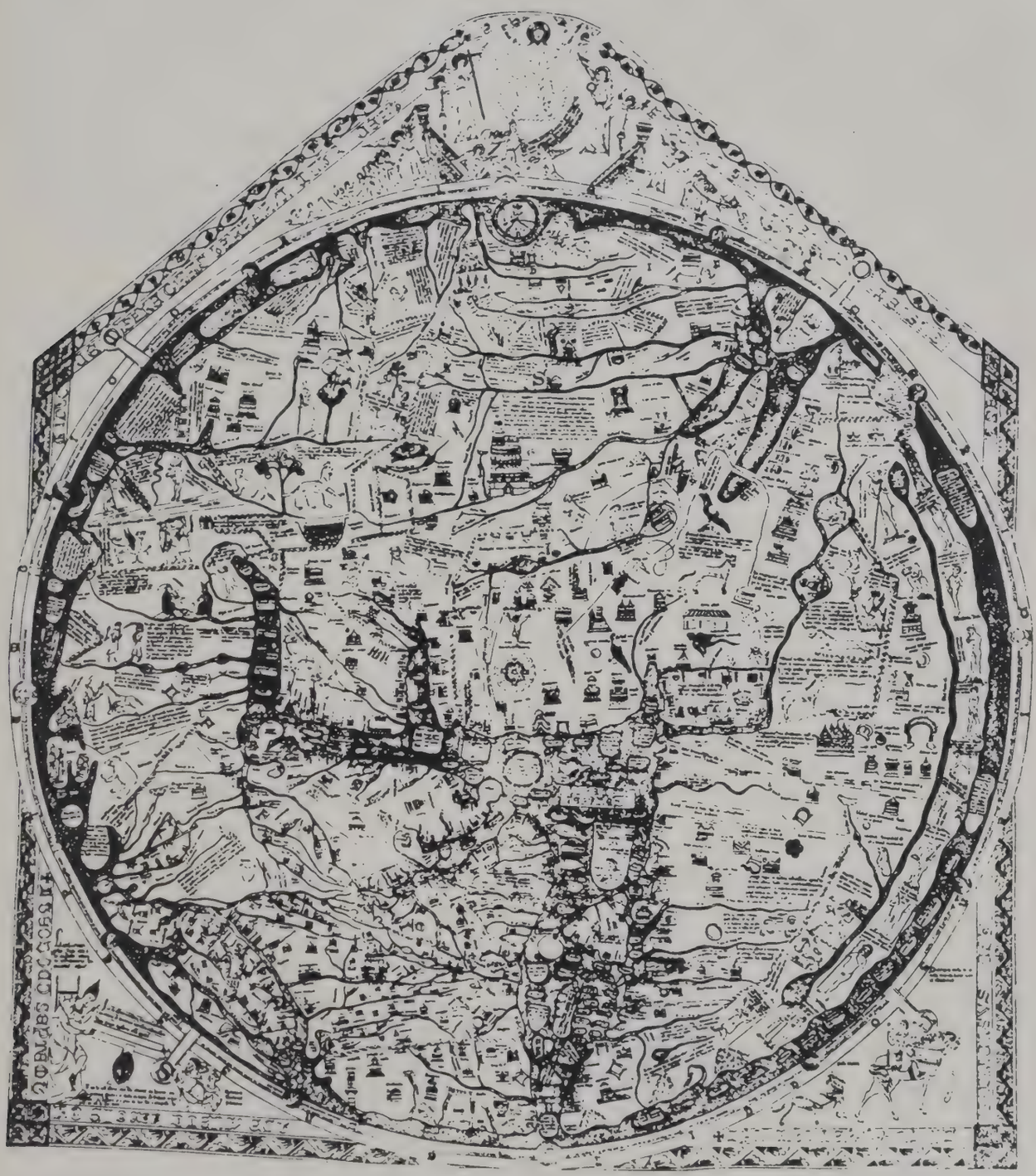
This is all part of the potent myth of Columbus the Discoverer whose superior science and indomitable will alone saved the day, claimed an unknown continent, and unleashed the march of progress. A myth that is nothing but a triumphal piece of misinformation fabricated as late as the nineteenth century, most notably by the American writer, Washington Irving. Like so much else in the history of the western self-image, this myth too is an intelligent, knowledgeably fashioned work of ignorance.

Contrary to popular imagination, Columbus never had to convince anyone that the world was round. No self-respecting medieval scholar believed anything else. The medieval European view of the world was always round. It was a complex vision evolved to accommodate Biblical assertion and such learning from Ancient Greece and Rome as was extant then in Europe.

Thus the great *Mappa Mundi* of Hereford, made around 1280, is decidedly circular. It is both a representation of geographical information and a map of ideas and ideology. It shows a land world surrounded by the encircling sea. The centre of the world is Jerusalem, the place where Christ walked on earth. Thus the Christian vision is placed at the heart of all understanding. Thrusting as near to Jerusalem and the centre is Italy, dominated by Rome, the second ideological centre of the world.

The earth for its part was understood to be a globe or sphere, a perception that was a remnant of classical Greek and later Roman scholarship. While classical knowledge had waned in the Dark Ages, most seriously through the decline in Western European facility in Greek, the broad outline of what was known to the ancient world constituted the learning of the educated European of the Middle Ages. The sphere of the earth was believed to be divided into circular bands or zones. On both sides of the Equator were the torrid zones, believed impassable because of their great heat. Then there were two temperate zones, one in the northern hemisphere, the other in the southern, the antipodes. Lastly there were two polar zones of extreme cold which were uninhabitable.

A delight in symmetry argued for the existence of a southern (antipodean) continent as counterweight to the great landmass of



The Hereford (England) World Map, *ca.* 1276.

the known world. It was also conventional wisdom that the antipodes, if they existed, were uninhabited and barren. This contention was confirmed by no less an authority than St. Augustine who was a major force in reconciling classical knowledge within the Biblical framework. The antipodes' lack of population was an important conceptual principle for the Middle Ages. To believe otherwise would have been in defiance of Biblical exegesis by requiring a second incarnation of Christ. It was however an uncontroversial concept, since the ancient scholars had anyway discounted the possibility of antipodean people.

The neatly zoned globe was graphically represented as a land world. Without any reliable measure of distance the size of the known, travelled world was vastly expanded, the extent of Europe around the Mediterranean, the Middle Sea, exaggerated. The distances comprising the once contacted further reaches of the habitable world were correspondingly shortened.

Columbus was thus not an enlightened man because he argued for a westward passage to the Indies. He was merely a dedicated believer in a small earth. He relied upon the retention of a classical error to support his Grand Design: basing himself on the underestimation of the circumference of the globe by Ptolemy, he argued for the westward passage thinking it to be the shortest route to the Indies.

New copies of the works of Ptolemy were recovered and circulated in western Europe in the early fifteenth century. Their popularity provided an appropriate forum for Columbus' argument in favour of his endeavour. Columbus would claim to 'go where no man had gone before', but only as a reference to the plausible novelty of his route, not a comment on his destination. Where he expected to arrive at - and maintained he had been to - was the Indies.

An even better picture of standard medieval geographic thought is available in the Psalter map, another thirteenth century work, now in the British Library. The Psalter map graphically represents the standard Ptolemaic argument for a land link between southern Africa and India. On it, the Indian Ocean is shown as an inland sea. Such a map gave further support to Columbus' novel argument. For what use was it for the Portuguese to inch their

way down the coast of Africa when the route to the Indies could be blocked by the *Terra Incognita* of the land link with India?

From the eleventh to the fourteenth century - that is, in the high Middle Ages themselves - maps were no abstruse concern of the occasional scholar. Maps were graphic encryptions of salient information. They were the ideological representations of what Mercator called, *oculus mundi*, a conception of an integrated view of the earth, its origins, man's place in that world and the diversity of mankind.

Ptolemy's map of Asia.

Maps graphically displayed the integration of the classical and Biblical worlds. Thus, the Psalter Map records what one would expect to find in the ambiguous spaces of the Indies. Inset there are a series of fourteen naked figures, one with a dog's head, others of people with no head but with their eyes and mouth on their torso, many recognizably consuming human limbs. These are the monstrous races, known as the Plinian peoples, from their description in the *Natural History* written by the Roman, Pliny the Elder (but more of this later).

Also shown on the Psalter Map are the rivers of Eden, located in the east, which appears at the top of the map, where the modern observer would expect to find the North Pole. Just as we will discover Columbus relying on the conventional medieval notions of the Plinian people to describe and identify the peoples of the lands he reached, we also find that he identifies the delta of the Orinoco as the outflow of the rivers of Paradise.

Both speculations confirmed his confidence in his own argument that he had arrived in the east, on the threshold of 'the Indies'. Both speculations marched straight off the page of medieval maps. If, instead of reading Columbus with a modern Mercator projection map in mind, one reads Columbus with the Psalter map in view he cannot any longer be thought mad or deluded. He emerges as a conventional European native of his times. The light that led him to the Americas was not the faint glimmer of imminent modern geography but the luminous images of those medieval maps.

* * *

Neither the Dark Ages nor the Middle Ages of Europe were as inward looking, stationary or immobile as received history would have us believe. Movement was inexorably toward Jerusalem, the centre of all those medieval maps, and it was summed up in the institutions of pilgrimage and Crusade. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem was a powerful and persisting European institution. It existed and grew in popularity throughout the Dark Ages and was at its height just before the preaching of the first Crusade by Pope Urban II at Clermont in 1095. His exhortation occasioned a massive response from all strata of European society.

The centuries of the Crusades opened Europe to trade and scholarship, inspired by its contacts with the remnants of the Byzantine Empire and the Muslim world. Far from being just a number of significant instances for travel, the Crusades planted a western European population in the Middle East that was constantly changing, constantly being replenished by a steady stream of travellers and immigrants.

As Chaucer's pilgrims tell us, people on the move liked to be entertained by tales. The *Canterbury Tales* also reflect the *oculus mundi* of the medieval world. Indeed, the great literary classics of the Middle Ages including the Song of Roland and the Arthurian romances all have a questing motif centred around or interwoven with the living institutions of pilgrimage and crusading. Thus the Crusades popularized genres of literature that were by no means the exclusive property of the literate. The information available to the learned about the earth and its peoples also made its way into the popular literature.

Central to the symbolism of history and literary convention was the moral drama of human existence, the supreme importance of the chivalric quest for eternal salvation through proper and correct identification of and response to the demonic and the divine. All knowledge and information was significant in so far as it fed into or derived from that Christian moral context.

It is also interesting to discover that this Celtic 'fringe' spawned two persistent traditions that spoke of Celtic 'discoveries' of America centuries before Columbus. The Irish St. Brendan, active in the seventh century but whose legend dates from the ninth, possibly got to Iceland before the Vikings. Irishmen certainly did so. The saint's quest for Hy Brazil, the Island of the Blessed, somewhere in the Atlantic, figures on most medieval maps. It should not be confused with modern day Brazil, since Hy Brazil is a corruption of *breas ail*, which can be translated as either fortunate or blessed isle. (Both terms are found on maps. The Brazilian nation, prosaically enough, got its name from brazil wood, a source of red dye).

The voyages of St. Brendan are in the questing genre and were possibly imaginary. The real message of St. Brendan is the superior significance of the interior quest for Christian understanding.

Though this message was conveyed through the context of actual Irish seafaring, its attraction and success as devotional literature was hardly impaired by its topical and historical reference.

Madoc, Prince of Gwynedd, the Welsh claimant to the 'discovery' of America, is a more spurious but nonetheless instructive legend. It is probable, though the evidence is sparse, that Madoc did exist in popular tradition in medieval Wales. But the beginnings of this legend were probably inspired by Mercator himself through judicious use of his own *oculus mundi.*

The Madoc myth first appears in print in Britain around 1579, after a comment the Dutch geographer made on the subject in a letter to the exotic Welsh scholar Dr. John Dee. So impressed was Dr. Dee by the letter that he proceeded immediately to urge the Virgin Queen to lay claim to the whole of North America on the basis of Madoc having landed there in 1170. The Welsh speaking Elizabeth I, after all, was the current representative of a Welsh dynasty, the Tudors. Her grandfather, Henry VII, whom Columbus sought to interest in his schemes for discovery, had consciously sought to legitimize his tenuous claim to the throne of England by employing his Celtic-British credentials, not least through naming his first born son Arthur, the same Arthur he sought to marry to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella.

In European thought, as the historian Gwyn A. Williams has so persuasively argued, the real historical quest is not for the truth or falsity contained in a specific legend. The measure of the importance of medieval history, geography, myth or fabulous travellers' tales does not lie in their empirical accuracy or error but in their ability to be acted upon as if they were real, to set empirical events underway. The significance of myth and literature, or even cartography and cosmology is that they cannot be read only as a store of empirical knowledge. They are also categories of thought and understanding through which empirical encounters are expressed.

None of the errors contained in medieval sources, of which later commentators made so much, are significant simply as errors. That is why admitting that they were errors often took an awfully long time, even in the face of compelling empirical evidence to the contrary. Well into the early nineteenth century travellers were still searching for Welsh-speaking Indians, descendants of Madoc's

'planting' in the Americas. We find no less a rationalist than Thomas Jefferson, whose family originated in Madoc country in North Wales, instructing the explorers Lewis and Clark to look for these mythical Welsh Indians.

As recently as 1953, the Daughters of the American Revolution erected a plaque to commemorate Madoc's landing at Fort Morgan, Mobile, Alabama. The plaque records several proofs including one concerning the similarity between the forts of ninth and tenth century Wales and those of the 'white Indians of the Tennessee and Missouri rivers.' In the 1970's, Tim Severin mounted an expedition to recreate the voyage of St. Brendan across the Atlantic—to prove it could be done. Thus, it is not mere cussedness to insist that European literary conventions and modes of thought had their part in prompting Columbus to set sail, and to insist they accompanied him on all his voyages.

So minuscule indeed was Columbus' hold on what is today known of the globe that it prevented him from even identifying his trans-Atlantic landing as a continent unknown to Europe. Columbus was sufficiently apprised of the cutting edge of Renaissance thinking to suspect that he had encountered a new continent. But so powerful was the hold of *oculus mundi* on the explorer and his European audience that it was more pragmatic and plausible for him to insist that he had arrived on the edge of Asia, that his islands were the gateway to the Indies by a shorter, direct route.

Thus, the personal or psychological profile of Christopher Columbus is less important than the cultural and ideological personality of European Christendom through which he operated. Individual life histories can divert attention from the generality and commonplaces of history. They render possible an easier (or kinder) construction of the past by providing convenient scapegoats. If the past can be reduced to the failings of an individual, the complicity of an entire culture and its participation in that individual's misdeeds need never come under scrutiny. What happened to America and in the Americas, the reflected impact of America on European ideas, and the manner in which America came to inform Europe's relations with the rest of the world can never be summed up in the life history of one individual, whether hero or villain.

The motivations and history, the *oculus mundi* of the whole of Europe, stood behind Columbus' get-rich-quick scheme. If anything revolutionary emerged from his undertaking later, as it also did in the case of his contemporary Copernicus, it did so because of the essentially medieval cast of his ideas and information. The work of Copernicus overturned Europe's geo-centric view of the universe, yet he has been described as the last great *Ptolemaic* astronomer. Columbus, whose exploits reshaped the European conception of the terrestrial globe, could have such an impact because he too was a student of Ptolemy who had shaped so much of the medieval European image of the world.

Copernicus and Columbus are often heralded as luminaries of the Renaissance. That is one of their main claims to fame. However, when applauding the Renaissance as the first triumph of modernity and as the end of the medieval age, it may be useful to remember the historian J.R. Hale's cautionary note, that the impact of the early Renaissance on European thought was to increase its deference to precisely those classical sources that were the common currency of medieval scholarship and European information.

The Renaissance was a shift of style and emphasis, a change in fashion. The intellectual building blocks of modernity during the Renaissance tied Europeans more firmly to their medieval roots. These blocks represented a continuity that was later to be reinterpreted as profound change. Thus it was the medieval spirit of inquiry and its scholastic techniques applied to classical sources that inaugurated the enterprise of the Indies. It was old ideas that made new departures when Columbus set sail from the port of Palos on August 3, 1492.

It is the myths that Columbus inherited which provided the real charter that set historic events in motion, not merely in terms of the geographic idea that there was a place out there to get to, but also in terms of the people one was likely to encounter once one arrived there. Accompanying Columbus was not merely a whole set of icons, but also a mental geography that included an anthropology of barbarism. The latter had its origins not in the medieval ages in Europe, but rather in the earlier Judaic tradition and the civilizations of Greek and Rome to which Europe became heir.

Us

The foundations on which western civilization are grounded, its attitudes to nature and to people living beyond its frontiers, were first set not in the time of the Greeks but much earlier, in the soils of the ancient Near East where an itinerant people, the Israelites, eked out a constant struggle for survival as a 'chosen people' in a hostile environment. The record of the evolution of that struggle is available in the Old Testament Bible which forms the first half of the scripture of Western civilization.

Even a casual reading of the Old Testament will indicate that the Israelites unambiguously saw the earth as hostile and that they had an almost murderous conception of it.

As Frederick Turner observes, Adam's punishment in the Genesis myth is to remain in exile from the Garden of Eden. Under the Creator's curse, man enters the wilderness of the world, estranged forever from nature. Nature, in fact, becomes a cursed adversary, eternally hostile to man's efforts at survival. Likewise, Adam is fated to be an enemy of the animal kingdom. Human existence in this world takes on the character of an unremitting contest with nature in which man toils to fulfill God's command that he subdue the thorny, thistled earth and establish dominion over it. Thus the spiritual message of a tormented and suffering

human existence (the central idea of Judaic and Christian thinking) affects the valuation of nature as peripheral and sundered, even where the actual experience of nature and the environment were otherwise.

Subsequent Old Testament events have a cumulative effect of confirming this destructive aspect of nature and of reinforcing the anthropomorphic, adversary attitude towards the natural world announced in the Garden of Eden myth.

For the ancient Israelites, therefore, nature was not a power with which they could establish a celebratory, reverential relationship. On the contrary, it was a power they sought deliverance from, rather than surrender to. Nature had to be subdued, controlled and put to better use by man's efforts.

The God of the Israelites was also a different kind of divinity: he was perceived to be completely detached from nature: though he had created it, he was not to be found anywhere in it. Nature's role was subordinate: it existed merely as an instrument for the creator, to display his power. Compare this attitude with Islam's, in which nature remains sacred as can be determined by a reading of any Sufi scholar.

Similarly, a hostile attitude was mandated against other gods and the sacred notions of other cultures: they were to be seen as adversaries to the true god and destroyed. Intolerance, commands to destroy the sacred items of others, was incorporated in Judaic monotheism and was passed on to Christianity as well.

Through this Biblical history, particularly after the incorporation of the Jewish people within the Mosaic tradition, the whole spiritual past including its hostile valuation of nature would become part of the heritage of the West, part of the essential equipment Westerners took with them as they thrust out into the undiscovered beyond.

The second important source of western civilization derived from classical Greece. It provided for similar distinctions, but focussed much more instead on the separateness of the Greeks from other peoples. It is from the Greeks that Europe acquired the concept of the barbarian. The word which comes from *barbaroi* can be translated as 'babbler' or someone who could not speak Greek. For the Greeks such an inability in any person or race betrayed

simply a predominantly negative human condition because language was the tool of reason. To say that some people could not speak Greek was to imply they had no facility for reason and could not act according to logic; that their intellect was too poorly developed to control their passions; and that while they could apprehend reason they did not have possession of true reason. The term *barbaroi* therefore was applied to all non-Greek speaking people.

The Greeks were a trading and travelling people and their scholars great systematizers. So in their geography and history are collated many tales of distant peoples. In fact, a large part of the medieval iconography of Otherness is direct transmission of ideas, accompanied by geographical eclecticism, that originated with the Greeks.

The primal character in the Greek history of Otherness is Cyclops, the giant Polyphemos who captures Odysseus and his men in the founding Greek text, the Odyssey of Homer. Polyphemos inhabits caves. He is a gargantuan individual, has only one eye, and is also a cannibal. He possesses articulate speech, yet suffers a lack of 'civic institutions', religion and technological advancements such as agriculture and shipbuilding. He is also the origin of the legend of the Wild Man, a persistent figure in ancient and medieval thought. More importantly, the list of attributes by which Polyphemos is described and located reads (as we shall see later) like the pattern book not only of medieval thought but of the analytic categories that swayed the minds of Columbus and his successors.

Polyphemos occurs in myth, which is the magico-religious charter of Greek civilization. Within the mythic structure of understanding he inhabits the Golden Age, the age prior to the ordering of the contemporary world of the Greeks. The Golden Age is doubly golden in character; it is both an age of innocence and an era of wealth. So, linked with the notion of monstrous races are the aura and the lure of gold and riches that are to be easily acquired at the extreme edges of the travelled lands.

The Greeks thus very early established the outer dimensions of what later became the European debate about human nature and anthropology. The categories and attributes of humanity they used

to think about themselves and about non-Greeks have endured in Western thought. It is the Greeks who introduced the pygmies; the kynokepohaloi or the dog-headed people; the skiapodes or the shadow footed people; the Akepheloi, the people with no head and with their eyes on their chest; as well as the cyclops, the people with only one eye. Greek literature was also replete with hybrid races, minotaurs, centaurs and satyrs. The monstrosity of other peoples, the physical character of their being, is a direct corollary of the difference of their lifeways and behaviour from the Greek norm. Together they define the barbarism without.

The notion that barbarous peoples live a communal life is also equally old; to the hierarchic Greeks, even when they were democrats, this indeed was the ultimate in Otherness. It goes back to Homer and the Abioi, a people who have a vegetarian diet and are noted not only for their justness but also for the communism they practise. It was just as remarkable a concept when it burst upon Europe in the wake of Columbus as a feature of the New World.

Greek writers had thus collected a whole series of distinguishing characteristics that marked off the barbarians. These centred around dietary practices, sexual customs and cultural faculties and these attributes had a symmetrical play of opposition that Hartog argues should be seen as differences that are 'good to think with' or useful as a culture's 'navigational aids'. Much modern scholarship on the other hand, has attempted to unravel who these 'barbarians' were, viewing the reports as garbled versions of the reality of lost tribes.

The first report of this genre, describing the people of India for instance, was produced by Scylax of Caryanda, a Greek officer sent by Darius of Persia around 515 B.C. to explore the newly conquered eastern portion of his empire (the Indus valley). Scylax reported that the huge quantities of gold available to the Indians came from giant anthills to be found in the northern deserts. His descriptions of people were even more fantastic: some of the Indians, he wrote, had such enormous feet they would lie on the ground and use them as an umbrella over their heads. He also reported that the Indians in the extreme south were cannibals.

The great compendium maker of this large and varied tradition of fantastic reporting was Herodotus, whom the West calls the

'Father of History'. While the pre-Herodotan tradition had its pygmies in India, Herodotus located them in the interior of Africa. As for India's cannibals, these were now transferred to the Persian frontier. The eclecticism is neither arbitrary nor irrational, but a sign of enduring and important demarcations that unite phenomena within the common sphere of Otherness formed by cross-cultural contact. The monstrous races persist through time, despite increasing or decreasing contact, because they persistently represent distinctions that must be bourne in mind.

Ctesias of Cnidus, a critic of Herodotus, went a step further. The author of two separate treatises, one on Persia, the other on India, Ctesias portrayed the Indians as satyrs. His account was passed on to the Middle Ages via Pliny.

When Alexander of Macedon launched his bid for world domination, he travelled east accompanied by an entire coterie of experts who were to investigate and record these far off lands. (Centuries later, when Napoleon Bonaparte began his invasion of Egypt he took just such a similar party of scientific camp followers with him from which we date the modern rise of Orientalism). Few of the works of Callisthenes, Ptolemy and Aristoboulos, the experts who accompanied Alexander, survive but they spawned an antique Orientalism in the powerful Alexandran romance genre. This genre firmly located the monstrous races in India and the Indies. A second source for the Indian connection was Megasthenes, sent by Seleucis as an emissary to the court of Chandragupta in the fourth century B.C. He included in his reports the familiar litany of monstrous races and added a few new ones.

What has been recounted above concerning the Greeks could be repeated as being true also of the Romans. Rome of the Republic and of the Empire was also an hierarchic society, jealous of its citizenship to such an extent that not even the extension of citizenship could blur the importance of the *boni*, the good people, as essentially the corpus of ancient patrician families. The Roman world was more extensive than either its Greek predecessor or its medieval successor.

Pomponius Mela, the first Latin geographer of the period whose work is available revived the wild stories of Amazons, griffons and headless peoples existing beyond the known frontiers

The dog-headed people of India.

The shadow-footed and other fantastic people of India.

of Rome. He also invented the legends of Chryse and Argyre beyond India: the soil of the former was of gold, the latter of silver. These formed the basis of the first notions of prosperous lands to the East and later, of the conception of the Golden Chersonese (the Malay Peninsula) which would figure in the discourse of the Middle Ages.

The other influential geographer was Ptolemy of Alexandria, whose maps, as we have already seen, gained a new lease of life in the Middle Ages and eventually directed the explorations of Columbus.

With the expansion of trans-Saharan trade, Rome pushed the troglodytes further and further into the interior of Africa till they reached the goldfields of sub-Saharan West Africa. And Rome had no end of problems with savages. It is from the Roman horror and fear of the people of the woods, the barbarian tribes of North and Eastern Europe that we derive the very notion of savages, from sylvan, the 'sauvage', the peoples of the forest. The city of Rome existed for centuries with the lurking fear that savages would sweep out of the forests to murder them all in their beds. Rome fought its savages for centuries, set about supervising the civilizing of many of them, and eventually was overrun by them.

Rome left behind highly unflattering portrayals of these invaders that coloured historical perceptions of them for centuries. The Goths, Visi or Ostra and the Vandals and other barbarians who inherited the rubble of the Empire were desperate to accommodate Roman culture, not to destroy it. Nevertheless, they received a bad press from unregenerate, patrician, late Roman writers.

Roman literature is replete with accounts of the horrendous wildness of savages. Tacitus gives us the classic account of the woodland religion of the Druids, the Celtic religion of the oak grove, with the most lurid, blood-curdling references to their use of Stonehenge for human sacrifice. (Contemporary archaeology reveals this to be a superb piece of propaganda). Tacitus' account is no more lurid than Spanish accounts of Aztec ceremonies, and no doubt served the same functions.

To establish and reinforce the ideology of Otherness and to use it to buttress its own notion of civilization, Rome not only had apocryphal tales of its own encounters with savages but also the

legacy of the monstrous races acquired from the Greeks. (Greek scholarship was the foundation of the education and of the cultivated, refined life of Rome). This whole corpus combined in the work of Pliny the Elder, who died in AD 79, but whose *Natural History* was a standard work throughout the Middle Ages. (A heavily annotated copy was in the library of Christopher Columbus). Pliny covered the whole of the known world, writing separate books on Scythia, Africa and the Orient; each of these books has a similar structure.

For Pliny, Ethiopia is a new location for unregenerate monstrosity and many of the familiar monstrous races make their appearance there. But Pliny also wrote a seventh book in which he collected all the fabulous and monstrous tales he could find and it is this seventh book, published separately in the Middle Ages, that had an enormous impact on the western imagination. Here Ethiopia and India vie for distinction as the locale of monstrous races who appear in a profusion of names and attributes.

There is a direct parallel between the accounts of Pliny and Herodotus. In both, the monstrous races belong to a system of concentric circles which have their centres around Italy or Greece. As one moves away from the centre, the inhabitants become wilder and regional specificity less important. At the extremes of wildness - in Ethiopia, Scythia and India - the two texts converge. So the historic concentric circle that moves from Athens to Rome, from the fifth century B.C. to the first century AD, contains the same ideological conception of human nature and the diversity to which it can give rise. The reference is always to the human nature at the centre, the defining civilization against which the degree of wildness, barbarity and savagery is determined through the comparative narration of essential attributes. Behind all the interwoven threads stands the necessity to fashion an ideological dividing line between the civilized and the uncivilized.

As familiar to Ptolemy as they were to the last Ptolemaic seafarer, the monstrous Plinian peoples were a consistent part of the medieval European heritage. With the increased authority of the classical sources, as part of the context of the Renaissance, Columbus' reliance on and use of the convention of the Plinians was no medieval obscurantism, as so many writers today are fond of believing. The widespread medieval belief in dog-headed people,

amazons, and other monstrous races was part of an integrated set of ideas and a potent iconography of barbarism that sprang from classical sources.

As the Christian millennium advanced, the same iconography was soon fused with aspects of Christian ideology and given a powerful new lease of life.

Frederick Turner observes that while the original message of Christianity focussed on the divinity that dwells within and that is present in all creation, and of how one ought to live in accordance with this, once the religion had been transformed from a sect into an organized system, the emphasis shifted from the central message to the historical figure of Jesus himself. Thus Christ would henceforth be presented as the Son of God who intervened in history purely to show up the world as the contemptible thing it truly was; as someone who had assumed flesh only to show that it was possible to live beyond the body and to ruthlessly subordinate its desires to the utterly different needs of the spirit. This transformation is most obvious in the celebrated conversion of St Paul, where the conversion is equated with a kind of on-going self-slaughter. St Paul is referred to by historians as the inventor of Christianity.

Here then are the roots of that primary fissure in New Testament scripture that announce the fatal divorce between body and soul, between nature and religion, that has come to seem the very essence of the Christian faith. This development has had incalculable consequences for the history of the West and, through exploration and settlement, for the rest of the globe.

Turned away from the natural body, Christian history now becomes a steadily lengthening chronicle of mass neurosis. The hatred for the body deepens and is most vividly observed in the gory punishments inflicted by the mystics as they rack themselves on wheels. The aggression against the body is soon matched by an equally pathological hostility to the natural world, primitives, heretics and all other unbelievers. It is against such a backdrop that the Christian sees that he must seek his redemption and his paradise.

Into such an environment, it was but natural that the Wild Man and his Mate, the Wild Woman, with their classical and

barbarian antecedents would also be returned. The medieval fascination with the Wild Man was that he could potentially exist within the bounds of Europe, within the individual himself as a lurking force, always threatening to overcome and destroy him. He had therefore to be either civilized or sacrificed to civilization. He could hardly be allowed to remain his brutish and unrepentant self since as such he directly opposed the imperative extension of order. Tolerating him meant tolerating the brute within.

By the end of the eleventh century, with the influence of St. Augustine and his militant attitudes towards unbelievers, the violence had begun to turn outside of the self, first towards others within Christian society itself, thereafter beyond. Paul Johnson, in his history of Christianity, has called St. Augustine's militant attitudes, a doctrine of 'constructive persecution', whose objective was the orthodox uniformity of Christian society. This drive for orthodox uniformity is, in our view, a prime concept, a major social and political problematique of the West - the actual idea from which it goes manic and demented.

It is from this tradition that the notion that only such clones could be citizens was drawn. Baptism into the Church, a compulsory sacrament, created an obligation from which there was no release, the duty to maintain orthodoxy as determined by the magisterial power structure of the Roman Church. It was the only basis for citizenship that Europe knew or could conceive of. Not for nothing, therefore, has the historian R.W. Southern called medieval western Christendom, the most successful totalitarian society known to man. Both St. Augustine and later Thomas Aquinas, stressed the horrors of heresy.

The Crusades truly commence the pattern of large-scale, international Christian violence against all unbelievers that bears its fruit in the ruins of Tenochtitlan. The first major slaughter was effected in the spring of 1096 shortly after the First Crusade was preached by Pope Urban II at the end of November 1095.

It was, however, not against the Muslims but against the Jewish communities at Worms, Mainz and Trier: the Jews were to be followed by Albigensians, 'Saracens', witches, Africans and at last the Amerindians, Indians and the rest of humankind. The city of Antioch was next razed to the ground and all its inhabitants

annihilated to the last infant. Then followed the assault on Jerusalem itself (1099), where, in the words of the Archbishop of Tyre:

'Regardless of age and condition, [the Crusaders] laid low, without distinction, every enemy encountered. Everywhere was frightful carnage, everywhere lay heaps of severed heads, so that soon it was impossible to pass or to go from one place to another except over the bodies of the slain. Already the leaders had forced their way by various routes almost to the center of the city and wrought unspeakable slaughter as they advanced. A host of people followed in their train, athirst for the blood of the enemy and wholly intent upon destruction.'

Even the victors experienced sensations of horror and loathing: 'It was impossible to look upon the vast numbers of the slain without horror; everywhere lay fragments of human bodies, and the very ground was covered with the blood of the slain. It was not alone the spectacle of headless bodies and mutilated limbs strewn in all directions that roused the horror of all who looked on them. Still more dreadful was it to gaze upon the victors themselves, dripping with blood from head to foot, an ominous sight which brought terror to all who met them. It is reported that within the Temple enclosure alone about ten thousand infidels perished, in addition to those who lay slain everywhere throughout the city in the streets and squares, the number of who was estimated as no less.'

But it went on:

'The rest of the soldiers roved through the city in search of wretched survivors who might be hiding in the narrow portals and byways to escape death. These were dragged out into public view and slain like sheep. Some formed into bands and broke into houses where they laid violent hands on the heads of families, their wives, children, and their entire households. These victims were either put to the sword or dashed headlong to the ground from some elevated place so that they perished miserably. Each marauder claimed as his own in perpetuity the particular house which he had entered, together with all it contained. For before the capture of the city the pilgrims had agreed that, after it had been taken by force, whatever each man might win for himself should be his forever by right of possession, without molestation. Consequently the pil-

grims searched the city most carefully and boldly killed the citizens.'

The deep disease of this anti-natural religion was now manifest as the church began to identify the heretical ones ('Saracens' or sects within) with all things natural, earthy, animal.

The clearest illustration of the spiritual plight of the Western world before it reached out beyond itself into the wilderness is the violence of the Inquisition which was visited against over another million people. The Inquisition and its methods were considered as being for the benefit of the victim, there being absolutely nothing worse than living outside the life of the Church.

By the sixteenth century and the Reformation, the full force of the violence had been reached and the enemies burned by the thousands. A bishop of Geneva, Turner informs us, burned five hundred in three months. A Bamberg bishop burned six hundred. A bishop of Wurzburg, nine hundred. In 1586 the spring was late and its warmth weak in the Rhine-lands; nature's powers to be renewed had obviously been tampered with. Thus the Archbishop of Treves burned 118 women and 2 men in these fires of spring.

Both, Greco-Roman classicism and Christianity, shared a triumphalist self image. Both were highly conscious of the need to demarcate the boundaries between civil and uncivil, between the good people and the barbarian, between Them and Us. Both invented Otherness to define themselves. The process of maintaining their boundaries required the perennial reinvention of the other. The farther out from the European mainland, the more distorted and fictional the shapes of the world became.

By the century of Columbus, the civilization was possessed of deep-set, long-established attitudes towards the wilderness and indeed all unimproved nature, toward those who lived in the wilderness, and toward the relationship of 'civilization' to these. These attitudes soon transformed the nature of European society itself.

As people deeply infected with the ideas of their time, Christopher Columbus and his contemporaries were not new to this process of construction. However, the process of generating Otherness made a new departure and became a global project from the fateful watershed of Columbus' first landfall in the Americas.

It is useful here to return for a brief while to the Spain of Christopher Columbus and take a look once again at some of its other features. Muslim Spain was the only multicultural society of European history, in which Jews, Muslims and Christians lived in relative harmony. The final defeat and expulsion of the Moors after a protracted and savage religious war of eight centuries and three thousand battlefields changed all that. It left enduring scars on the Spanish psyche which had by now become immune to the cruelties of warfare. Sizeable men-at-arms were now left unemployed after the end of the war.

These circumstances determined the new fate of unbelievers in the Spanish midst: the new targets of intolerance, the Jews, were issued an official ultimatum in the spring of 1492: convert or be gone. A quarter of a million were forced from their homes and these forfeited to the Christians in the most cruel fashion. It is interesting to note that the hand that signed Columbus' sailing orders for the Crown was the same that signed the ultimatum to the Jews: it belonged to Juan de Coloma.

Other significant developments were also taking place at the same time reinforcing the tendencies already at work within Spanish society. Elio Antonio de Nebrija, historiographer royal, was busy instigating Queen Isabella to look within and to consider how she might bring 'order' in her own realm. Nebrija professed great anxiety and dissatisfaction 'over the unbound and ungoverned speech in which people actually live and manage their lives,' and persuaded the Queen to see this as a challenge to the throne. He proposed to bring internal order by imposing a grammar on the untutored language of the masses, inventing the idea that people need to be taught to speak if they were to be considered citizens of the modern world.

Now therefore as Columbus set sail, he readily possessed, in addition to this proximate history, the more long term, persisting, demented mind of the West with all its 'twisted religiosity and its background of classical geography and medieval folklore.' The Indies would become for him and his successors a new battle ground for a new Crusade. They would leave it littered with dead bodies. And not those of human beings alone, but of other species as well.

The Encounter

It is well known that Christopher Columbus, from that eventful day in October 1492 till almost the final year of his life (1506), continued to believe that he had discovered a new and shorter route to India and China, that he had indeed landed on the east coast of faraway Asia.

And as he had anticipated, when he made his first landfall, he found himself in a populated land. He hoped the peoples he met would lead him to the gold he sought, or to the court of the Great Khan. He also expected that they would unfold for him the world of the Indies as represented in medieval European literature.

The moment he made land, he began exercising the power of dominion that he had been granted by royal warrant and papal pronouncement. He was now a Viceroy of somewhere. To locate the 'new' land, he named it within European convention; his first landfall he called San Salvador, in honour of Christ the Saviour, even though he knew the people of the island called it Guanahani. The entire modern map of the Americas stands witness to the arrival of the European Christian vision to re-order and relocate its geography.

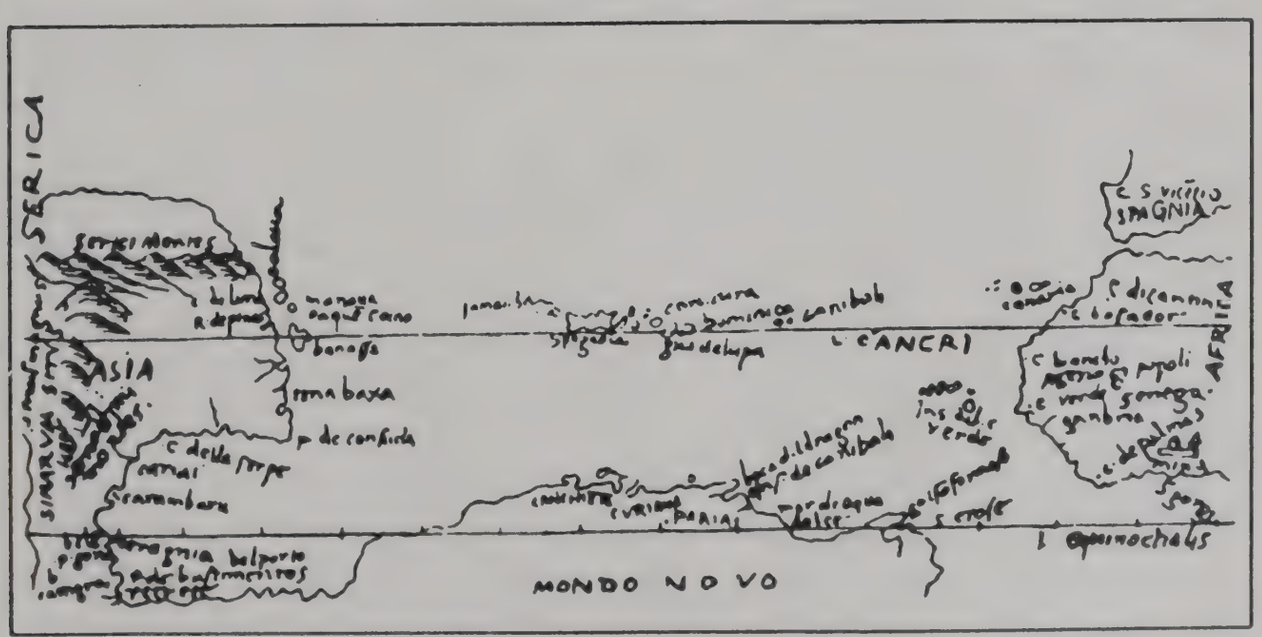
To further underscore the subordination of the territory to its new masters Columbus went on to name subsequent landfalls after

the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella and after Spain, their nation.

Yet it is the Christian terminology that figures most prominently in the new destinations created by Columbus. Most frequent are his references to the Holy Trinity (Trinidad), for which he had a special reverence having dedicated his voyages to it in conventional medieval fashion. Other islands took the names of the Virgin: Santa Maria de Guadalupe, Santa Maria de Monserrate, Santa Maria La Antigua. The sea he named the Caribbean, after the Caribs, a people he decided were cannibals.

One of the features of the post-Columbian world is its unilateral assumption of the right to name, the linguistic equivalent of the act of appropriation. As the centuries unfold, ever new names will emerge to label non-European peoples and their environment, commencing with the 'wild', the 'primitive' and the 'savage' and terminating with 'backward', 'undeveloped' and 'underdeveloped'.

With his third voyage, when he sighted the continent of South America itself, Columbus was already convinced he was very close to the Earthly Paradise itself (it being commonly accepted then that



The New World ("Mondo Novo") as Columbus saw it after four voyages. Note how "Mondo Novo" is part of Asia.

Paradise lay in easternmost Asia), '...where no man may go, save for by the grace of God.' This conviction dawned on him when he chanced upon the four rivers that emptied into the gulf of Paria. In medieval times, Eden was shown on maps as a mountain from which the four rivers of Paradise (the Ganges, the Nile, the Tigris and the Euphrates) flow.

'I have come to the conclusion respecting the earth,' he now wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella, 'that it is not round as they describe, but of the form of a pear, which is very round except where the stalk grows, at which point it is most prominent, or like a round ball, upon one part of which is a prominence like a woman's nipple, the protrusion being the highest and nearest the sky, situated at the equinoctial line, and at the eastern extremity of the sea...I do not suppose that the earthly paradise is in the form of a rugged mountain, as the descriptions of it have made it appear, but it is on the summit of the spot, which I have described...'

In terms of the expectations associated with finding a route to the Indies the returns made by Columbus were meagre, a fact that goes a long way to explain the melancholic paranoia he developed in his later years. Cast ashore in Spain, determined to reap the rewards he considered his due, Columbus only saw neglect and indifference in his treatment by everyone. His own assessment of his fate has deeply influenced the writing of history and dominates the debates of biographical history.

The goods the Viceroy brought back included the obligatory item associated in all European annals with far flung places: gold. The quantities were small, certainly no treasure trove, but a reasonable taster for gold hungry Spain, conscious of the far greater amounts currently flowing into its neighbour Portugal from West Africa. The Viceroy had also collected and reported (erroneously) on the potential of the flora of the Islands. But these did not contain the pepper, cinnamon, cloves and mace that were the true riches of the Indies. And he brought back slaves.

The new territory the Viceroy won for Spain seemed to be a collection of islands. They could be just more of the Atlantic islands, like the Canaries, Cape Verde, the Azores but Ferdinand and Isabella immediately set about colonizing them in routine Spanish fashion. As we have already noted, the colonization model

had a long history: it derived from the pattern of internal colonization practised in Spain during the *Reconquista* and which was underway in the Canaries at the time of Columbian voyages. Land liberated from the Muslims in Spain itself had not been empty land; rights over land and its resident peasant population were parcelled out as feudal fiefs to Spaniards and a process of internal migration to these newly won regions encouraged. Spain pre-eminently, but not uniquely in Europe, brought an extant colonial policy to bear on new acquisitions, whatever their geographic location.

The Spanish monarchs were also swift to set the international seal of approval on whatever might arise from the newly opened western route. They secured a pronouncement from Pope Alexander VI dividing the world into two spheres of influence. In subsequent papal bulls, *Eximinie Devotionis* and *Dudum Squidium,* Spain was explicitly granted the same concessions in new territory as the bulls *Romanus Pontifex* and *Inter Caetera* had bestowed on Portugal. Portugal had its long established predominance in seeking a route to Indies by sailing around Africa confirmed, while Spain got monopoly over the westward passage.

The Papal line dividing the globe into two spheres for Portugal and Spain was drawn in 1493: a hundred leagues to the west of the Azores. After a year of diplomatic wrangling between the two nations the line was settled 300 leagues west of the Azores by the Treaty of Tordesillas.

Columbus was caught out by the ambiguity of the lands where he had gone and soon overshadowed by more straightforward events. The only general term he himself ever used for the 'Indies' of the west he brought into Europe's orbit was 'otro mondo', another world - an appropriate phrase indeed for a person who had arrived in the Americas with a perception of Otherness that was quite conventional to the Europe of his time. Though his enduring claim to be a discoverer is in the very otherness of the people he made known to Europe, his discovery tragically soon reduced itself to a conscious work of creative invention through which Indians were fabricated anew out of a historically sanctified set of medieval European ideas.

'In these islands,' he wrote, 'I have so far found no human monstrosities, as many expected, but on the contrary the whole

population is very well formed.' But in a very short while the humanness of the people he met was dismissed as a deceit of the senses, not real. Faced with real people whose manners and mores were outside his experience, he set about charting their similarities and differences, using Europe as the base and norm for comparison, employing for the purpose the distorting anthropology of medieval Christendom and its convention of the monstrous races. From the storehouse of the ideologies, imageries and expectations of medieval conventions employed in describing the Arawak and Taino, Columbus invented people other than the Arawak and Taino he actually encountered.

Historical and other accounts usually stress Columbus' sympathetic first accounts of the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands. When these are pitted, however, against the iconography of barbarism he brought with him as part of his spiritual baggage, a different picture emerges: the enigma about how Columbus, in his role as the Viceroy of the Ocean Sea and all it contained, could depict the people as innocent inhabitants of a terrestrial paradise and simultaneously speculate on the riches to be gained by enslaving them, completely disappears.

Thus he was lavish in his accounts of the tractability of the people he invented as Indians. But when the outrageous demands of the Spaniards caused friction among them and they revolted, he was equally swift to adduce further, entirely consistent evidence of their barbarous condition. When these mythical Indians defied or opposed the invaders, they came to be seen as the fierce, wild Caribs, cannibals to the last man, woman and child. As we shall soon see, however, most other accounts repeated the lie. Even those in Europe reading the reports behaved little better than the Admiral. In most cases, the end result was a restoration and reaffirmation of ancient malformed images rather than their transcendence.

The Debate in Europe

In his study of how the classical and medieval legacy was utilised to represent the New World, Peter Mason picks out, as one example, Diodoros' account of Iamboulos, a traveller who voyaged to the seven islands of the Heliopolitans, a people supposedly located in the regions of India.

The Heliopolitans are responsible for the legend of El Dorado and the seven cities of gold for which both Sir Walter Raleigh and Coronado searched in vain in the Americas. (The explorers never found the cities but did bring huge tracts of territory into European orbit). According to Iamboulos, the Heliopolitans have hairless bodies, are very tall, live to the age of 150 years, have their women in common and are extremely versatile in the reproduction of all kinds of sounds including bird song.

As Mason notes, many of these features reappear in *Mundus Novus*, Alberico* Vespucci's account of the Amerindians, a report that became a European best seller around 1504. It is a telling instance, if any were required, of the linkage between ancient source and modern usage. Alberico Vespucci uses hoary Greek sources, and predictable ones at that.

(Iamboulos is also the precursor of the utopian genre: We can trace not only the modern tradition of anthropological discourse to Vespucci, his *Mundus Novus* soon became the point of departure for Thomas More's *Utopia*, and the entire modern tradition of utopian social thought. Iamboulos and his Heliopolitans, argues Finlay, were not far from More's thoughts when he wrote his vision of a better world. But neither was Vespucci's account that became the setting written into *Utopia*; Hythlodacus, the novel's reporter, is said to have been a shipmate of Vespucci).

Anthropological self-examination in recent years has shown how questions predicate answers. The questions bring the worldview of the questioner with all its conventional knowledge-base and assumptions into play and determine what the questioner hears and notes down as an answer. Contemporary anthropology begins with the accounts of Columbus and the first European visitors to the Americas.

* See note on following page.

Thus in both the Americas and the Indies it was the conventional habits of medieval scholarship that were deployed to describe, distinguish similarities and differences and locate these lands and their peoples and make them knowable so that control could be exercised over them. It was a conscious process of invention according to the established norms of European thought, a conscious product of the Christian worldview.

In the Americas this process posed questions and for the first time subjected the unity and universality of this framework of European thought to critical assessment. As Anthony Padgen says, all the medieval writing about barbarians and Plinian races was speculative, a mental construct. It was the Americas that truly made it actual and turned it into a mental device that had to be deployed to make this new space legitimately subject to European domination.

Resolving the ambiguity of the 'newly discovered' space and particularly its peoples, extant but unknown, knowable but taxing to the conventions of European thought, naturally set the intellectual circles of Europe spinning. The big question of the era for Europe was what to make of where Columbus had actually reached.

One commonly accepted conclusion was more or less similar to what Columbus himself had decided: these were unknown shores of the known world posited earlier by Ptolemy. They were new lands, new shores, but not a new world.

By 1504 Peter Martyr, philosopher at the court of Ferdinand and Isabella, was arguing that South America was actually the antipodes, the reputed southern continent. Others argued that it was a 'western antipodes'. The reference to antipodes originated from the medieval cosmography of Macrobius, who had stated that such unknown antipodes occupied both the northern and southern parts of the same earth, balancing the known land mass.

As more information came back, the lands visited by Columbus began to be mapped. Martin Waldseemüller produced a new world map in 1507 and for the first time coined the phrase 'America'* for this new space. He was impressed by Alberico

* It is widely assumed that America is named after Amerigo Vespucci, who claimed to have touched the mainland of South America in 1497, whereas Columbus

Vespucci's claim to have recognized a New World across the Atlantic. In his map of the world, the new world appears for the first time separate from Asia.

The persistence of the old images, however, is starkly revealed in the 1538 map of the Dutch cartographer Mercator referred to earlier. The Mercator world map does not merely record and confirm the existence of the Americas. It transfers to the West Indies the marvels and fabulous inhabitants previous maps had located in the East Indies! The fountains of youth, the golden cities, as well as the dog-headed people, the amazons and anthropophagi who had previously lodged firmly east of Europe now populate the new found lands of the west.

This direct transference was neither a simple quirk of stay-at-home geographers nor an unfortunate but excusable flaw in the early days of the charting of knowledge. On the contrary, it was a representation founded on the direct reports of those who had been to the New World, on what they said they had seen and gleaned from the native inhabitants. The Mercator map thus inscribes reality as witnessed and testified to by Europeans. What they saw and described emerged directly from *oculus mundi*, the history and information peculiar to Europe.

himself had landed in the Antilles and Cuba. But Jan Carew has a different story to tell.

He observes that Amerigo's original name was actually Alberico and that Alberico changed his name to Amerigo only after his visit to the Mosquito coast. There is a mountain range in Nicaragua called the Sierra Amerrique and a group of Indians called Los Amerriques. The Amerriques had always been in contact since pre-Columbian times with the whole length of the Mosquito Coast and with the Cape Garcia a Dios where Vespucci landed in 1497.

Carew comments that the gold that the invaders sought soon became synonymous with the word Amerrique. In the archives of Toledo, a letter from Vespucci to the Cardinal, dated 9th December 1508, is signed Amerrigo with the double 'r', as in the Indian Amerrique. And between 1508 and 1512 when he died, there are at least two other letters bearing the characteristic Amerrigo.

Carew has unearthed a letter from Dr. A. Le Plongeon, a nineteenth century scholar from Merida (Yucatan) dated 10 December, 1881, which states:

"The name America or Amerrique in the Mayan language means a country of perpetually strong wind, or the Land of the Wind, and sometimes the suffix `que' `ik' and `ika' can mean not only wind or air but also a spirit that breathes, life itself..."

In the Mayan genesis myth, the Popul Vuh, wind stands at the centre of creation.

As the 'New World' came to be established in European understanding, the first major issue concerned the origin of its people: how was this to be explained? The only available framework for explanation was the Biblical account in Genesis, which established a genealogical connection between all peoples. How could inhabitants of a previously unrecorded continent be part of this genealogy?

No one was about to throw out the Genesis account. Indeed European thought was reluctant to take this leap even in the late nineteenth century, as the outcry against Darwin's theory of evolution made clear. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the ideas, terminology and logical structure of the Christian worldview were the only things to think with, there were no conceivable alternatives. So the peoples of America had to be tacked on to a unitary structure while it in turn was subtly altered to take account of new pragmatic concerns.

So the Amerindians would be thought of as representing primal simplicity that existed before the flood, or degenerate examples of human regression planted in their new continent after the flood and the dispersal of nations after the fall of the Tower of Babel, genealogically related to the inhabitants of farthest Asia.

By the time the French Huegenot Issac de la Preyere (1594-1676) was writing he could speculate that there had been no universal flood and hence there were separate origins for different peoples of the world, and the polygenist basis for racism had been laid. He argued there were categories of men, including intermediate groups of humanoids such as nymphs, satyrs, pygmies and wild men, which included the Amerindians, who were descended from a different 'Adam' and hence sundered completely from true men, which meant primarily Europeans.

The fascination with the questions raised by the origin of the Amerindians stimulated a conscious inquiry within Europe into the origins and status of humankind, and in turn led to reformulating the categories of Christian understanding. Vast quantities of new information were becoming available that exactly fitted the fashion for antiquarian interest in Europe.

The Americas were immensely 'good to think with' at precisely the time when Europe was reforming its own understanding

of Christianity and hence reopening and shifting its categories of thought. The movement known as the Reformation was prompted by and involved solely European concerns. It was a search for a purified understanding and practice of the Roman Catholic religion that ended by fracturing the unity of Roman Christianity. To justify and sustain the Protestant vision of Christianity as the true and full meaning of the Bible was not merely a work of theology and spiritual amendment. It had to reopen the entire question of the origin and purposes of creation and humankind.

The construction of a new Protestant worldview was far more central for Europe than the invention of a New World and new people. But in the elaboration of that Protestant vision, the New World and its peoples provided crucial new possibilities for thinking about human history as a process of secular changes.

Thus (as we shall shortly see) the earliest staunchly Protestant settlers in North America regarded the rapid spread of death and disease that decimated the Amerindian populations as providential - the work of Providence in clearing the path for its chosen elect to follow their calling in a new land. It was a true proof of their calling, of the superiority of Protestantism to the heresies of Popery, because it was not the experience of that most Popish of Empires, the Spanish, further south in the New World.

The essence of Protestantism was to conceive of itself as foredestined work of God; it represented the providential rise of human society to a new, more complete, more correct understanding of the meaning and purpose of creation. Protestantism reformulated the whole European conception of authority: religious, intellectual, social and political. The Fathers of Theology, the early founders of Christianity, were shown to have been in error by new philological studies of early Greek Gospel texts. The Ancients, the classical scholars of Greece and Rome, were also shown to be in error by practical experience stemming from increasing contacts with the whole of the world and the new understanding of the place of the planet Earth within the universe, due to the impact of Copernicus and Columbus.

The authority of Church dogma was overthrown; it seemed to deny the real relationship between man and God. This relationship was now seen as personal. It worked through grace and was

justified by faith. The authority of temporal rulers, kings, who failed to adhere to the newly revealed truth of the Gospels, was not binding on those who dissented from the religion of their ruler.

The authority of Protestantism over social life reformed European convention. There was now a priesthood of all the believers who had a duty to think, a warrant to interpret the world for themselves guided by their personal conscience and experience of grace. The laity were no longer separate from, and secondary, to the religious and the clergy. The life of this present, secular world became more important to European thought, as did the understanding of its history.

The Reformation is dated from Martin Luther pinning his Ninety Five Theses to the Cathedral door of Wuttenburg in 1517. It did not become a rupture until the Diet of Worms in that fateful year of 1521. No sooner had Magellan brought a whole globe into European orbit than the world of Europe was split apart and vital questions of Europe's understanding of itself had to be answered afresh. Newness, change, and the invention of progress as an historical process underway in the present did impress themselves on European consciousness under the impact of the Reformation. But the ideas were legitimated by the worldview of early Christianity. Developing this worldview into a reformulated conception of human nature and civil society would have been impossible without the medieval gaze that *oculus mundi* turned on the New World.

Thus, there was no rupture in the application of medieval iconography and ideas to the peoples of the New World. The invention of the Other was a vital tool for European self consciousness, whether influenced by Protestantism or Counter-Reformation. Luther explicitly rejected Aristotle, who he thought was on his way to Hell, but he did so in favour of St. Augustine. Yet, as we have already seen, Augustine himself subscribed to an essentially Aristotelian notion of Otherness and barbarity. When the unitary framework that united European self-consciousness was under stress, its need to redefine what was European laid even greater stress on the horrors without. While Europe bathed itself in blood with a savagery that almost out-rivalled its activities overseas, it is little wonder that the imagery of noble savages living in an earthly

paradise of a Golden Age had immense potency, especially since these idylls marked other people off as the real barbarians.

How then did one administer the new world and what was the status of the people it contained vis-a-vis Europeans? This question was earnestly debated in Spain by special councils or juntas called by the monarchs. Contending view-points were expressed by canonical and civil lawyers and by theologians to resolve the legal framework for the disposal of rights over land and people now brought under the control of Spain.

As had happened with Columbus, the debates employed familiar medieval categories of thought and argument and, as Padgen has shown, inaugurated modern anthropology. St. Thomas Aquinas had systematized the medieval understanding of Aristotle and given two general categories of Otherness to Europe: the vincibly ignorant, those who had heard the message of the Gospel and refused through their incorrigibility to accept its message. This category consisted of the Muslims, Jews and other Semites, and the others who had been within Europe's experience throughout its existence.

The second category were the invincibly ignorant, those who through no fault of their own had never properly encountered the message of the Gospel and hence could be evangelized and converted.

There was thus a gradation of Otherness in which adherence to Christianity and tractability to Christian instruction was the distinguishing mark of what constituted fully humanized and civilized people. As we have noted earlier, it was a quite explicit and persistent part of European consciousness that without Christianity not only was there no salvation but also no full civil life, since there was no gap obtaining between the definition of the norms of behaviour of humanity in general and the norms of Christian behaviour. Aquinas had speculated on the origin of civil life, but he left no doubt that it was through the social character traits that basic human nature was demonstrated in the world.

This distinction now became the main focus of the Spanish debates about the peoples of the New World. The central theme in these debates did not come from within Spain. It was provided by the Scots theologian and historian John Mair (Johannes Major) who

was based at the College de Montaigu in Paris, a university with a tradition of not supporting the universal claims of Popes or emperors. Mair became the first in a long succession of Scottish intellectuals whose ideas indelibly marked the course of European thinking. The continuing debate cannot be seen in terms of narrow self-interest and political expediency, though they undoubtedly played an important role. It must also be seen as the exertions of *oculus mundi* to integrate and resolve the attendant questions posed by its invention of a new world. The idea that John Mair took from Aristotle and included in his book of 1519 was that 'by nature, barbarians and slaves are the same.'

The first Spanish junta met in 1504 and concluded that Amerindians were vassals of the Crown, which could dispose of them legitimately. The real challenge came in 1511 when the Dominican, Antonio de Monesinos, excoriated the citizens of Hispaniola for the 'cruel and terrible servitude' they imposed on the Amerindians.

This charge struck at the roots of the ambiguity of Spanish claims to legitimate suzerainty over the New World. The Spaniards could cite the papal concession of rights over any lands they acquired. But this was shaky political ground. There was no widespread acceptance that the Pope had the authority to dispose of such territory, especially at a time when papal authority was at its weakest and the Popes themselves at their venal nadir.

Legally, too, it was a moot point. The legal framework of European thought was historical: it saw the Papacy as an inheritance from the twin pillars of Christendom. The popes were the successors of St. Peter, therefore with a lineal authority going back to Christ himself. And they were the spiritual encapsulation of Europe's descent from the Roman Empire from which came much of Europe's legal thinking.

Accordingly, there were three categories of rights, which incorporated three categories of pagans. First, those who lived outside the Church but on lands that had once been part of the Roman Empire and were thus reclaimable and within the *dominium*, the property of the church. The Spanish Crown used such claims to legitimize its rights to land in North Africa, arguing they were the successors of the Vandals who had occupied these areas in Roman times.

Second, there were areas and peoples in the world who were lawfully subject to a Christian prince. Such rule derived from the medieval conventions on conquest, taking land in a just war, or by treaty, when a local ruler acknowledged the overlordship of a Christian prince in the feudal manner. This was the model employed by the Portuguese in India.

The third category contained the true infidels, people of lands that were neither subject to legitimate Christian rule according to the second category nor had ever been within the bounds of the Roman world. The people of this third category, the category that included the Amerindians, were not within the framework of Christian rule either *de jure* or *de facto*. They were a problem, a problem that Columbus had himself unintentionally helped to create by his reports of their pacific nature and of their tractability to Christian instruction.

This brings us back to the Papal concessions: they had efficacy only if their terms and conditions were fulfilled. These insisted on the Christianisation of the Amerindians without inflicting 'dangers or hardships' upon them.

The *Encomienda*

The institution at the centre of the debate that questioned the right of the Spanish Crown to sovereignty over the New World was the *encomienda*. This is no abstruse argument, for the *encomienda* is part of the social formation of South America to this day, the backdrop of every land reform movement that has ever taken place and foundered.

The *encomienda* is the allocation of so many head of people to an *encomiendero*, who therefore acquires a servile and cheap labour force. The problem was that if the territory, the physical area or space of the New World actually belonged to Spain by papal donation, the Crown could not make war against its own vassals, the inhabitants of the New World. Such a war would not be just. Nor could the crown willfully enslave them.

If the right of the Pope to dispose of lands that had never been part of the Roman world was questioned, as of course it was by other European monarchs on the make and anxious to acquire territory for themselves in the New World, some other means of

justifying Spanish sovereignty had to be elaborated. It was precisely here that the idea of the barbarian as a natural slave became crucial.

People were barbarians due to the flaws in or deficiency of their reason, and this was established by the manner and mores of their social life. It was a behavioral fact that could be observed. Such natural barbarians, argued the Spanish hard-liners, could not have reason in sufficient measure to be said to have full possession of dominium or rights over their land and property. (Recall here the earlier Greek notion that those who did not speak Greek, the language of reason, were barbarous by definition).

By their nature such people were also natural slaves, able to apprehend the reason of others and follow commands. Therefore they were also naturally dependent. Since such people had no true dominium over their land or their persons, the former could be legitimately acquired by the first Christian monarch to come across this fortuitous space. The barbarians could not be said to be dispossessed because they really had no true possession in the first place. Indeed it was worthy and permissible for the Spanish crown to enslave such natural barbarians, since the proximity to civilized Christians would assist their rise out of what might, under tutelage, be a treatable condition and thus be to their benefit.

If this argument sounds similar to the one used in the debate on black slavery that ran throughout European annals until the 19th century, this is hardly surprising. The only difference with the latter was that there had never been any doubt about the rightness of enslaving the blacks since it could be substantiated neatly *within* the Biblical context. According to slavery's supporters, it was Noah's curse on the descendants of Ham, the black race, to be hewers of wood and drawers of water.

But the ambiguity of the status of the Amerindians, the difficulty in giving them an unequivocal Biblical genealogy, required elaboration and definition, and focused European thinking on the implications of barbarism as natural slavery.

The consistent tenor of the reports that came back from the New World depicted the social life of the Amerindian as the negative of European norms of civil life. These reports formed the substance of the legal argument about whether they could be

enslaved. These reports were also adjudged against the concept of natural law, a law implicit in humanity by its common divine creation. To have social behaviour that was inimical to natural law was to define oneself forthwith as a barbarian. (This was a completely circular argument. The only way to be within the confines of natural law in the ultimate analysis was to be a Christian, since there was no conception of these laws that was not simultaneously a definition of Christian life).

When people back in Europe read Vespucci's *Mundus Novus* letter, for instance, they learnt that its inhabitants 'have no laws or faith and live according to nature.' However, this did not mean they lived according to natural law, for animals also lived according to nature.

Thus the category of people who were 'American Indians' was constructed out of European conventions of which they were but negative examples. Again and again in early accounts one reads: 'They have no ...' Vespucci is a classic example of this, writing: '...they have no private property because everything is common, they have no boundaries of kingdoms and provinces, no king... They obey nobody, each is lord to himself... [They have] no justice and no gratitude ...They are a very prolific people but have no heirs...'

What these people lacked were the characteristics of the society of Europe. What they in reality possessed was never the concern of their European observers. The effort of the observers was merely to locate them, so that they could be disposed of following the legal conventions of European life. (Today, those who propagate and push 'development' look at those untouched by it in similar terms. Development literature, in fact, repeats this discourse *ad nauseam*).

Thus, to report that people were naked, lacking body hair except for long tresses down their back, lacking a sense of private property, reliant on the use of the bow and arrow, lacking family institutions and religion, and their artless willingness to ape the doings of the Spaniards was to locate them intellectually and legally outside the bounds of civil society and to suggest that they had no right over the territory they inhabited. It was to attest that they were fit subjects for enslavement.

Likewise, the use of the idea of the Golden Age was not to add lustre to the understanding of the innocence with which the Taino shared what they had with the newcomers, worked for them, and exchanged gold ornaments for dross. It was to place them outside civil and legal protection, to make the formality of the *Requerimiento* Columbus read to them irrelevant, since no treaty ceding dominion to the Spanish crown was necessary from people who were evidently transient users, not owners, in the strict legal sense of their own lands and goods. (The *Requerimiento* was the declaration the conquistadors were required to declaim before an uncomprehending people, announcing Spanish arrival and intention to preach the Gospels).

Likewise, Alberico Vespucci concentrated a good part of his report on the alleged sexual proclivities of the Amerindians. Contrary to what is so often suggested by modern writers, his reports could hardly have been appalling to an allegedly prurient European readership horrified by nakedness. Prurience was not a feature of medieval Europe, as the stories told by Chaucer's pilgrims demonstrate. Certainly it was not a feature of the Renaissance. (Michelangelo's version of the Biblical story of creation spread over the ceiling of the Sistine chapel acquired breeches only after the Reformation). Vespucci's observations and reports were part of the common and necessary list of inquiries into the outward manifestation of the inherent human nature of the people he encountered. His reports for instance naturally located the women of the Americas within the well known convention of the Wild Woman.

And then there were the reports about cannibalism.

The charge of cannibalism had been a standard trait of most Greek, Roman and medieval accounts concerning the nature of the barbarian. It was a condition to be expected along with the lack of civic attributes. The appearance of opposition to the conquistadors would inevitably lead to the Taino being questioned about the nature and practices of those others who declined to serve the Spaniards. In the absence of a common language, it was inevitable that the incomprehensible answers of the Taino would be translated as detailed accounts of institutionalized cannibalism that almost every traveller to the 'new world' provided.

The most elaborate account of cannibalism is provided by Diego Alvares Chanca, who accompanied Columbus as the ship's doctor on his second voyage. Chanca's tale of people herded ready for the pot, of women kept like battery hens to produce youngsters for the pot, of boys emasculated for fattening to make them plump and tender like capons was widely recycled. It was also a natural for illustration, its imagery remaining alive and potent in European discourse for centuries.

Such graphic images of cannibalism are an indivisible part of the early sources on the Americas. One early illustration shows a stall constructed of palm fronds where a man, depicted like some burgher butcher, is chopping up bodies and hanging human haunches of flesh, heads, arms, thighs, for display. The same image reappears three centuries later, this time to represent the European view of African cannibalism in the nineteenth century. William Arens, who reproduces the picture in his book, *The Man Eating Myth*, observes that despite the persistence of the image, there never has been any reliable evidence for the existence of culturally constituted cannibalism. Europeans asked the questions and recorded the 'responses' in their journals and diaries and the myth was correspondingly maintained.

The issue here is not whether the case for cannibalism has been proven or not; we are more interested in seeing the obsession with cannibalism as a pointer to the power of the European mind to overwrite the world. This far more important question has never been addressed or investigated.

These early pictures of cannibalism had a gross impact on the European imagination because they were in effect coded messages. They employed familiar symbols to represent and recall ideas that pre-dated contact with the Americas, ideas that were a familiar part of European discourse. The pictures said far more than the text by locating the reports of the Americas within the European worldview and its extant notions of the boundary existing between itself (the true civil society) and all others, a category which comprised all the diverse peoples of the East Indies.

Thus, the same woodcuts kept being reused: many of the illustrations used for early accounts of the Americas were actually swiftly amended woodcuts that had previously been used for texts

that had nothing to do with the Americas. There was nothing strange or aberrant about this. The account of the Americas Chanca sent off to the City Council of Seville was based, as he himself related, on the testimony of a former woman captive picked up at sea, who was interviewed when the interpreter (that is, he himself) was absent.

All this really went to prove that the peoples of the New World lived entirely contrary to natural law. These 'objective' tests confirmed the status of the Amerindians as barbarians and led the Europeans back to the argument that such people could be enslaved.

The debate in Europe over the status of the Amerindian was not all one-way traffic. It brought to the forefront more sharply defined concepts of the Other and the content of Otherness. It also faced counter-arguments that denied the status of the Amerindians as natural slaves. There were those who denied the full humanity of the Amerindians, regarding them as part of the old category of *similitudines hominis*, hominid in appearance but between man and beast in the Great Chain of Being that was an hierarchical ordering of all creation, a convention of the medieval outlook.

Others, notably Francisco de Vitoria (1492-1546) of the School of Salamanca, argued persistently against categorizing the Amerindians as natural slaves. They were true humans, with reason, who were therefore in possession of *dominium* over their land and property and could only be enslaved according to the medieval conventions of being deemed inimical to Christ by resisting the preaching of the Gospel.

(It is this strain of thought that led to the full development of the *Requerimiento*. If, after it was declaimed, there was the slightest sign of resistance, this would categorise the Amerindian as inimical to Christ and fit to be dispossessed of both land and life).

De Vitoria had no problems with slavery as such. He expressed the uniform European view of the matter when he wrote: 'if they [the Africans] are treated humanely it is better for them to be slaves among Christians than free in their own lands, for it is the greatest good fortune to become a Christian.'

But the ambiguity of the Amerindian had to be resolved otherwise, for those people were in their own land and free, even

if they were not fortunate enough to be Christians. To meet this problem, de Vitoria then went on to advance a different argument. He accepted that while the Amerindians might appear to be 'very little different from brute animals who are incapable of ruling themselves,' they nevertheless had 'a certain rational order in their affairs.' The deficiency in the rationality of the Amerindians then was not inherent in their nature but the fault of their 'poor and barbarous education.'

That is, the peoples of the New World were not natural slaves but natural children, heirs to true reason once they had been properly educated and grown up. Their cultural condition, based on their faulty education, made them incapable of fully rational behaviour and this warranted the Spanish Crown's right to hold them and their lands in tutelage, until they reached the age of reason.

When Rudyard Kipling centuries later summed up the white man's burden as nurturing the savage who was half devil and half child he was merely restating the basic perception of the European worldview, in its most favourable and humane version. The demonic part of the equation always existed in the medieval framework, as we have seen, and had much greater prominence in the Protestant response to barbarism, derived from the far greater Protestant reliance on reason as the basic human characteristic and on the reliability of the tools of reason to uncover the demonic imitations Satan used to mock the Christian world.

Natural children could be subject to *encomienda* so long as this institution rested on regarding the *encomiendado* as being exercised on 'free' people who retained their freedom in a legal sense and did not become true slaves. The proviso was that the *encomiendero* had to undertake to provide the dependents with Christian education and a minimal wage.

This became the full form and fictive usage of the *encomienda*. In practice it was close to the full legal slavery that existed side by side with it in Spanish territory. However 'free' the *encomienda* might be as a legal nicety, the Amerindians could not freely move from one place to another and were tied to their master. As for the actual treatment and instruction they received from the conquistadors and settlers, the evasions and the non-observances were

summed up in the phrase, '*Obedezco pero no cumplo*', 'I obey but I do not fulfill.'

The debate concerning the barbarian thus honed the tools of medieval thought afresh for a colonial encounter that had not been part of medieval experience. All the reports from around the globe constructed a servile array of the Other and unfolded a new consciousness of the European self. In this process it was not merely 'we' who were re-defined but also the European 'they'. The corollary of the natural slave or the natural child was the existence of the natural master and the natural teacher representing an innately superior, Christian way of life over others.

While medieval Europe had entertained no doubt about the pre-eminence of Christianity, it had developed a deep perplexity about why Christianity failed to deliver mastery in the world. The ubiquitous medieval theme, the Crusade, wrestled continuously with this central problem. Why six centuries after Christ had walked on earth, died to redeem all mankind and established the only way to salvation and full human existence, had another Prophet arisen in Arabia? Why had the heresy of Islam spread so rapidly and acquired such worldly success that it threatened and dominated Europe? In its dependence upon Muslim civilization, source of not merely goods but also knowledge and techniques, medieval Christianity had not a sense of triumphant superiority but a gnawing self doubt.

Only after those 30 years of rapid expansion (from 1492 to 1521) designed to out-maneuver Muslim dominance did the conditions exist for Christian self-confidence to re-emerge. The triumphalism of the worldview that rejuvenated Europe found new meaning when it was embodied and symbolized by the domination of such vast lands and so many peoples all around the globe. The natural master could only be fashioned as a European when the gaze of *oculus mundi* was turned across the Atlantic to the New World whose possession marked off this new era from all its predecessors. The torch of civilization was now seen to be moving inexorably westward, from Greece to Rome and to the Atlantic littoral, or from Jerusalem to Rome and to the Atlantic seaboard. So much was expressed by Machiavelli, and later by other Western thinkers like Vico, Herder and Hegel.

The anthropology of Otherness that was fashioned to include the New World in the universal framework of European understanding could then become a new global convention that would envelop and change Europe's relations now with even those continents that had, unlike the Americas, been known within the medieval convention: Africa and Asia.

The cultural conditions of the people of the New World and their deviations from Christian norms were frequently read off against existing models of barbarity contained in the medieval and classical storehouse. The Amerindians were like Ethiopians (a term that could be applied to anyone from Abyssinia to India), or Thracians or Scythians. There was no conception that these peoples who had existed in ancient times might have been subject to history and change.

There was no historical imagination either, as the iconography of history and travel writing of the medieval period makes abundantly clear. To examine the illustrations of the *Lives de Merveilles*, a fourteenth century collection of travel writings including Mandeville, Marco Polo and Friar Odoric, is to find Indian elephants whose howdahs are modelled on medieval ships or battlements, and where the procession of the Great Khan looks like an illustration of a royal European scene.

Other times, other places and other peoples were depicted according to familiar imagery. When Holinshed's *Chronicles* were published in 1577, they included an illustration of the ancient British queen Boadicea confronting the Roman legions. Boadicea is the very image of Queen Elizabeth I and the Roman legions are conventional soldiers of the Elizabethan period.

However, when Thomas Harriot published his *A Brief and True Account of the New Found Land of Virginia in 1588* it was illustrated by the artist John White. White's beautiful and meticulous drawings, now in the British Museum, may have owed a great deal to classical proportion but they showed a new attention to the ethnography of the people of America, their dress, homes, tools and agricultural economy. When Harriot and White's work was republished in 1592 in part one of *America* by Johannes de Bry it also included an appendix entitled 'Some picture of the picteswhich in the olde tyme dyd habite one part of the great Britainne'. Thus even

the ancient Britons, Rome's barbarians, were now depicted as Amerindians. Europe had acquired a decidedly new mental picture of peoples of the past.

The antiquarians of Europe were now able to lay their hands on a whole new body of information and imagery to inform their notion of the original condition of mankind. The process of inventing the primitive had begun, and leapt directly from the newness of the New World. Employing what Margaret T. Hodgen called 'old and convivial ideas' from the medieval and classical intellectual inheritance, the European mind began to fashion a new sense of history as a movement of civilization from its primal, original condition to the present day, where Europe, instead of being beholden to other civilizations, could see itself as the culmination of all civilizations.

In this progression, extant peoples of the earth who were now within the *dominium* of Europe became evidence of stages through which European civilization had passed on its upward journey. The question that would fascinate and redefine the European self image was phrased anew in the post-Columbian era by Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) who had plenty of opportunity to observe Amerindians, imported to France to entertain at carnival side shows. The question appears, appropriately, in his essay 'On the Cannibals': 'to what was that partition into civil and uncivil to be ascribed?' The question goes on being asked in various forms down through the years in Europe. It is still being asked today in the development debate: 'Why did industrialization, the scientific and industrial revolutions occur in Europe and nowhere else?'

Fitting the people of the New World into the Biblical framework of explanation was a search for such an answer and for a unitary understanding of the universal existence of mankind. Civilization was interchangeable with the term culture. As the historian of anthropology George Stocking Jr has pointed out, both were used in the singular until the late nineteenth century.

One could have different ideas about what happened to mankind after the Fall from Grace and Expulsion from Eden. There could have been a primal innocence from which man had risen under the Hand of Providence, or a degeneration into barbarism by those who did not fall into the orbit or refused the guidance of Providence. Those earliest reports of 'the earthly Paradise' pro-

vided by Columbus and Vespucci and so many others contained a new way to think about such issues. The ancient Greek formula of the three Ages, the Gold, Bronze and Iron ceased to be a link between mythic and modern time and became a concept of historical time.

The extant and real people of the world that Europe was busy inventing all around the globe by the application of Christian terms and conventions to their cultural life, were simultaneously being employed to create a new sense of the past. The Other were not merely removed from Europe by being savages or barbarians who lived differently outside the Church or Christian confession. Thanks to the newsness of America, they were sundered by being people of a past age Europe had transcended. They had remained static, or got stuck at a stage where Europe had once been in its past, while Europe had progressed spiritually, intellectually and physically beyond the confines of the ancient world.

Howsoever crude it may sound, the uniform offer Europe made to the Other in the period of its great explosive movement around the globe was to choose between either enslavement or conversion. This much was contained in the philosophy of the Papal Bulls that legitimated the process. We have seen how enslavement was justified by conceptualizing the barbarian as by nature dependent on the natural master. Conversion was the tool for teaching the arts and usages of civilization.

The Crowns of Spain and Portugal were the most Catholic of Monarchs. The crowns' privileges, granted by the Popes, made them administrators of both the temporal and spiritual affairs in their new possessions. The Church was under their control and the appointment of its personnel in the new lands was a royal prerogative. For the monarchs, the Church in these territories had explicit political functions. Conversion was understood by monarchs and by the missionaries they despatched as a means of separating the pagans from their former condition and then inducting them into the Christian worldview, which was coterminous with the European way of life. As Axtell put it: 'To convert the Indians of America was to replace their native characters...by substituting predictable European modes of thinking and feeling for unpredictable native ones.' The process was not confined to America; its scope was soon to become global.

Of course, the assimilation of the Other to the manners and mores of Europe was no instant transformation. It did not put the new Christians on par with their masters. It involved changes in habits, dress, food, marriage customs, family connections, often abode, language and political affiliation, as the means of getting civilized.

But conversion would also keep them second class citizens. Christianity remained a European cultural product, whose evaluation and definition remained in the hands of the master. In reality, the masters perennially deferred the passing out examination. As the missionaries were constantly complaining, the new Christians were often acquired by brute force, at the point of a sword; improperly educated in their new faith and its social mores; and there were never enough missionaries anyway to attend to the work of evangelization, not least since the priests who did arrive in the dominions were too busy undertaking the commercial exploitation of the new territories to attend to the harvesting of souls.

As Boxer points out, the Portuguese were loathe to appoint indigenous Christians to positions in the Church, either in India or Africa, to overcome the missionary problem. This held true despite occasional notable exceptions. But conversion did create a tractable hinterland for the Portuguese outposts and Spanish territory.

The Laws of Burgos of 1513 crystallized the Spanish approach to conversion in the New World. It agreed to the herding of Amerindians away from their former homes because they were but inconstant Christians, prone to flee to the jungle. There was a constant feeling among the colonisers that the Amerindians' 'sole aim and pleasure in life (was) to have the freedom to do with themselves exactly as they please.' This was a freedom the post-Columbian world could not afford. (And it continues to say so even in our own times).

The conversion strategy generated its own ironic circle of events. To aid the process of conversion by distancing the Amerindians from the brutalities of the settlers some Catholic orders began setting up new communities. The first such example was instituted by Vasco de Quiroga with his village hospitals in Sante Fe, Mexico.

Quiroga was firmly against slavery, but a staunch supporter of *encomienda*. In his *Informacion en Derecho* of 1535, he gave comprehensive arguments for the indigenous peoples' lack of rights in their own land. These people could be herded away from their former abodes and distributed into *encomienda* because they did not have rights of *dominium* which belonged only to those 'who at least know and observe the natural law, do not worship many gods, and have a king and an ordered politic life.'

In the Americas instead, its peoples were living 'in tyranny of themselves as barbarous and cruel persons, in ignorance of things and of the good and politic life' which went a long way to explain how they could be so oblivious of the mechanisms of the natural world as to allow themselves to be so easily overrun by the Spaniards.

Among such peoples as the Aztec and the Inca, there had been no true politics, but only tyrants who were worshipped, 'not as a human being among free people but as a god among captive, oppressed and servile people.' They were ripe for conversion under supervision which was best undertaken in special communities where they could be led into a full Christian life.

The Jesuits later adopted Quiroga's model. Thus, when they separated the Amerindians from the rapacious Spanish settlers, it did not mean giving them (the Amerindians) the liberty to do with themselves exactly as they pleased.

It seems likely that Quiroga was influenced in establishing his village hospitals by a book in the possession of his superior, the first archbishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumarraga. The book was Thomas More's *Utopia* which we have seen was itself based on Vespucci's *Mundus Novus* in turn inspired by Iambolous! More's classic condemnation of the material conditions of European civil life, what one might term the tyranny of property, would have been heresy had he rooted his ideas in examples drawn from European history. Property, *dominium*, the crucial question of the New World was understood by Europe as an essential feature of civil life and property relations as something that could arise only in true civil society.

Yet Christian movements based on the idea of holding all property in common and living in pacific community had been a

persistent part of medieval experience too. They included the Cathar heresy that had prompted an internal Crusade in Europe, and the Waldensian heresy. But these were familiar unmentionables. To argue for the amendment of property relations in Europe, More used the visionary possibilities of information brought back from America by Ralph Hythlodacus, shipwrecked when accompanying Alberico Vespucci to the New World. Indeed, the New World was 'good to think with' whether one's concern was the political agenda of Europe or the bringing of the rest of the world under European control.

Ideas from the New World also assisted and made it possible to devise new strategies to promote individual liberty in Europe. The notions of regarding the primal condition of man and of the stages of human progress were informed by contact with other peoples. Both ideas played a crucial part in structuring European political debate for centuries. They are present in Hobbes ('the war of all against all'), in Rousseau (the liberty of the noble savage as understood in the Tahitian century), and in Karl Marx. They are also there in the romantic movement that crystallized the concepts of nationalism and racism.

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It is important to emphasize here that the westward expansion across the Atlantic cannot be disassociated from the eastward expansion via the southern tip of Africa: both expansions were one and the same undertaking and from a European point of view, the eastern expansion probably even remained for some time far more significant. It was ideas occasioned by Columbus going west that enabled Europe to re-evaluate and demote all eastern peoples and universalize themselves as the norm. But it was not only evidence from the New World that achieved that. The imperatives of exploiting the Americas, and the historical sequence of events by which they developed, are only fully comprehensible in light of the rapid success of the Portuguese in reaching the Indies and their rapaciousness in exploiting their mercantile opportunities.

Thus, though Columbus is the watershed of globalization, how that globalization occurred and what it contained is equally dependent on what happened in Europe's eastward expansion.

In the same year (1498) that Columbus imagined he was discovering his Paradise, the Portuguese Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut in south India to pocket the prize of the Indies for Portugal. Europe could be enthused and perplexed by reports from western waters. The Venetian trading complex, however, trembled at the news from the east. Spain could only query what relation their new territory had to India.

The Portuguese king, Manuel 'The Fortunate', lost no time in writing an exultant latter to his Spanish cousins about da Gama's voyage. In July 1499 Manuel informed them that not only had da Gama located great quantities of cloves, cinnamon and other spices but rubies and all kinds of precious jewels. To prove incontestably that these were the real Indies he added the exaggerated claim that they also found 'lands in which there are mines of gold.' In August 1499, in a letter to the Pope, Manuel styled himself 'Lord of Guinea and of the Conquest of the Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India'.

By 1500 Portugal had established its first feitoria (trading post) at Calicut. By 1510, spices, cargoes worth many times their weight in gold were entering Europe via the Casa da Guine, Mina e India in Lisbon and the long established Portuguese factory at Antwerp, the economic hub of Europe. By 1509 the Portuguese had reached Malacca on the Malay peninsula, the port that put the Golden into what Milton later termed the Golden Chersonnese, because it was the key strategic possession in the Indies. Trading vessels from as far as China and from throughout the Indonesian archipelago gathered in the bottleneck of the Straits of Malacca to trade in the city.

By 1511 Alfonso de Albuquerque had captured Goa and Malacca and raised a fortaleza (fortified settlement) there. Feitorias had sprouted on Java, Amboina and in the Moluccas as far as Ternate.

Da Gama provided Portugal with domination of the highly developed, profitable and extensive trading network of Asia, lock, stock and spices. The Portuguese were unequivocally in the process of fulfilling the long held European aim of striking at the underbelly of the Ottoman Empire by means and in terms that Europe easily understood. By harrying trading vessels in the Gulf

of Aden Portugal did succeed, in the short term, in cutting off the spice trade through the Levant, drying up the Ottoman revenue from this overland trade and causing havoc with the source of Venice's prosperity.

As for the Spaniards, they were still a long way from having much to show from the Americas, as the space to the west was beginning to be called to help define the Indies. Spain still had only islands and a tenuous sense of an isthmus or peninsula or perhaps a mainland whose relationship to Asia was becoming increasingly questionable. And by a quirk of the Treaty of Tordesillas it had no monopoly on the land now located in these western waters for, as Portugal was quick to point out before Columbus' death, part of the mainland coast of South America, what became Brazil, was also within its sphere of influence.

Both Spain and Portugal were keen to retain the rights granted by Papal concessions in western Atlantic waters, but other European nations were just as keen to challenge this cosy duopoly. Henry VII of England, having failed to back Columbus, was anxious to stake his claim in western waters, even if belatedly. He licensed the voyages of the other Genoan seafarers, the Cabots in 1497 and 1498 to secure him a western passage to Asia. The Cabots sighted land north of the Caribbean on the mainland of North America in 1498. French voyages were soon making contact with the Brazilian coast and along with the Dutch were working to open the trade in its characteristic red dyewood trees.

In 1513 Balboa marched down from a peak in Darien and claimed the Pacific Ocean for Spain. He had been looking for the waterway, a river route, that Columbus had speculated might exist on the isthmus of central America. (The waterway did not come into existence until the building of the Panama canal in this century, the first vessel to make the voyage from Atlantic to Pacific by this route sailed in 1913!) Balboa confirmed what Columbus had reported, that there was another body of ocean beyond the lands of Spain's Indies.

It was in 1519 that Cortes burnt his boats on the coast of Mexico at the start of an unauthorized expedition that would begin resolving the ambiguity of the land that lay around the Caribbean. But before Cortes could complete the conquest of Mexico, Ferdinand Magellan, sailing in the service of Spain, unequivocally proved that

whatever territory Spain had acquired was an Indies of the West, separated by a vast ocean from the Indies of the east, the real spice islands. It was only after 1522, when the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan was reduced to rubble, that meaningful quantities of gold began to flow to the Casa de Contraction in Seville. It did not swell to a flood until the 1530's when Pizarro unleashed on Europe the 'sweat of the Sun' and 'tears of the Moon', as the conquered Inca of Peru called gold and silver. It was 1545 before Potosi, the mountain virtually made of silver was discovered in what is today Bolivia. Far more silver than gold crossed the Atlantic from the Americas to Europe, which was fortunate since it was silver that the merchants of the Indies required in payment for the immense and ever growing spice trade in which Europe was increasingly engaged.

What Portugal achieved by the eastern route was a monopoly of licensing the carriage of trade that would enable it to corner a market that had been part of European life for centuries. The newly acquired ability to control this trade by naval power meant an internal shift in the European balance of power. Dutch and German companies producing copper goods for the India trade were soon relocating to Lisbon.

But the incorporation of this vast expansion of trade and the extensive lands and diverse peoples it contained was no problem for European consciousness. It was a familiar world the Portuguese entered. The King of Java and his golden court were familiar figures from Mandeville's *Travels*, which includes a section dealing with the islands of the archipelago. It is well authenticated that the first members of Vasco da Gama's crew to arrive in Calicut were met by two Spanish speaking Tunisians. 'What the devil brought you here?' the Tunisians are reported to have asked. In these Indies Europe could proceed to enlarge the old annals; it would have little cause to question them.

Mandeville's version of the King of Java, for example, dominated European interpretation of Javanese society to such an extent that the anthropologist James Boon recently argued that Europe always acted as if he were right and administered the island quite contrary to Javanese convention.

The Indies of the east were familiar, but it did not mean they were not also invented by Europe in the same way as the Americas were invented. So easily did news of da Gama's success fall into the

established political pattern of European thinking that the Venetians sent spies to Lisbon and an embassy to the Sultan of Egypt. Both Venice and Egypt had a great deal to lose from the disruption of the overland spice route that ran through Arabia. The Sultan duly made a threat to take action against the Christian holy places in Palestine, which sent the Prior of the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai off to Rome to petition the Pope, who in turn sent the Prior, Frei Mauro, on to Lisbon where Manuel, not surprisingly, declined to accommodate his entreaties. It was exactly like the Crusades all over again. Europe could respond to Portugal's new acquisition of dominance by long established ideas in a consistent context of action. It was nothing new.

In reply to the bemused Spanish speaking Tunisians, the Portuguese crewman is said to have replied: 'We have come to find Christians and spices.' A fair summation of the intentions expressed in a series of Papal bulls going back nearly half a century.

There were two interpretations, neither of them inconsistent, in their use of the term Christians. The Portuguese monarchs had long had a fascination about Prester John. This Christian King reputed to live beyond the Muslim lands was a familiar figure of medieval literature. To a Christendom anxious to overthrow the dominance enjoyed by the Muslim world the prospect of an alliance with a strategically placed co-religionist was inviting. The Portuguese duly found Christians in India, the Thomasine Christians of Cochin. They also quickly made contact with the Christian Kingdom of Abyssinia in Africa. Indeed so keen was the imperative of locating Christians in the Indies that for sometime they debated whether Hindus were not also garbled Christians. Certainly Hindus would make useful allies against the Muslims, who the Portuguese found depressingly ubiquitous wherever they went in the Indies.

It was in these first encounters in India that the divide and rule policy so characteristic of the high colonial era began. It worked through the standard medieval ploy of shifting alliances. Just as in the case of the Atlantic slave trade, the divide and rule policy began in exactly the reverse direction to its later classic form. In India it began as an alliance with the Hindus to circumvent Muslim power, centuries before the British sought to use Muslims

to neutralize Hindu aspirations. The kinds of treaties and alliances the Portuguese began to establish were in no way different from the way the politics of nations operated back in Europe or had operated during the Crusades and between the Crusader Kingdoms and the politics of the Levant.

The second interpretation of seeking Christians was another consistent aspiration of the medieval mind set, conversion, which would speed the inclusion of new territory into the unitary framework of Europe. The newly contacted territory would be a fertile field for the harvest of souls by preaching the Gospel.

Manuel 'The Fortunate' was accurate in the title he took for himself in 1499. What Portugal swiftly established was the conquest of navigation and commerce. It had little interest in direct control of vast tracts of territory. In typically medieval fashion it sought to establish its feitorias. It already had feitorias in Antwerp, many dotted along the coast of West Africa. More quickly followed in the Indies. Where there was opposition and a need to protect their vital interests from potential attack, fortalexas were built as at Sofala on the East African coast and Malacca on the Malay peninsula.

But these tools of conquest did not involve control of a hinterland. Treaties of alliance that made local rulers tributary subjects, in the feudal fashion, to the king of Portugal were all that was needed to secure the surrounding areas. Nothing more clearly expresses the fact that these Indies were already a part of the world-view, the *oculus mundi*, of medieval Europe, a region to which the conventions of its law and understanding applied.

The monopoly Portugal did claim in the Indies was over the sea and it exercised it on both European and indigenous shipping and trade. In 1509 the first Viceroy of the Estado da India, Francisco de Almeida, defeated the fleet assembled by the Sultan of Egypt and his Gujarati allies off Diu in Gujarat. This overturned the victory the allies had enjoyed the previous year at Chaul and effectively ended the only potential indigenous naval challenge to Portugal in the Indian Ocean.

The bigger and well armed Portuguese vessels were the guarantors of a truly maritime empire. The legal principle the Portuguese advanced to secure their empire was the *mare clausam*,

the closed sea; the instrument of control was the *cartaz* that all shipping had to obtain on payment of a fee and which required them to use specified, Portuguese controlled ports. The Indies did not exist merely to service Europe. It was a region with its own established lines of trade and communication, a life of its own. Into this sphere the Portuguese brought disruption, for without a *cartaz* any vessel was liable to be attacked and seized, so the prudent sea captain or merchant obtained the permit and it became another cost to be borne in the overall realignment of the pattern of trade of the Indies.

Thus the first mercantilist empire proceeded to organise itself as a kind of institutionalized piracy, along the lines of the privateering that had carried European vessels down the coast of West Africa. Thus the cycle that began with Henry the Navigator and is mythologized as the 'Age of Discovery' reached its completion in the grandiose title of Manuel without the content of the process undergoing any change.

It was over a century before other European powers seriously began to challenge the system Portuguese naval power had established in the Indian Ocean. When that happened, it was almost as an extension of internal European political disputes to the colony of the sea. The Dutch as part of their war for independence from Spain began systematic incursions into Portuguese enclaves around the world, in both the Americas, India and the Indies. The choice was a logical extension of European policy concerns. The Portuguese possessions were the most vulnerable part of Philip II of Spain's Empire, since Philip also happened to be king of Portugal. And by infuriating the Portuguese with their attacks, the Dutch might, as indeed they did, cause them to rebel against Philip and strain his resources, making it easier for the Netherlands to escape his clutches. Thus after 1640 the Dutch acquired control of most of the territories administered by the V.O.C., the East India company, from Portugal.

After the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511, Albuquerque sent a squadron of vessels to explore the Indonesian archipelago. They visited Java and Amboina, setting pillars to mark their claim and took on cargo at Banda. One of their vessels was shipwrecked by bad weather but rescued by local seamen and taken to Ternate where the Portuguese gained their foothold by

assisting the local ruler in his war with the Sultan of neighbouring Tidor. A full report of these islands was sent to Magellan by his countrymen.

When the news of these islands reached Europe, Spain instantly suspected they must be in its sphere of influence, by merely running the line of the Treaty of Tordesillas around the globe. In 1512 Ferdinand even considered the possibility of sending a fleet to take possession of the Moluccas.

In 1514 Manuel 'The Fortunate' sent a sumptuous embassy to Pope Leo X to secure them to Portugal instead. The papal bull *Precelsae Devotionis* renewed the concessions previously made to Portugal and once again granted them the lands secured from infidels wherever they might be. The Spaniards continued to argue for recognition of the principle of Tordesillas as a global line right around the world.

It was the return of Magellan's Victoria that opened a hectic period of negotiation between Spain and Portugal. A treaty signed at Badajos in 1524 provided that each nation should send three astronomers and three pilots to meet on the frontier and establish where the line demarcating their spheres of influence actually ran, while lawyers met to resolve the question of ownership. Geographic techniques and knowledge were inadequate to settle the point.

In the end control of the Moluccas was resolved on purely pragmatic grounds. In 1529 Charles V of Spain, still leaving the principle vague, conceded effective control to Portugal for much needed cash. The Spanish had arrived too late and missed out on the Spice Islands. In the race for the Indies, Columbus had caused them to lose out to Portugal in the Indies that mattered most. Their base in the east, beyond the Indies, was to be only the Philippines, from where they would, a couple of centuries later, be ousted by the Americans now driving *west*.

The Conquest of India

The question is often asked why the Europeans did not undertake the same violent conquest in India as they had accomplished in the Americas. The answer lies in the early European perception that India was an advanced country and would take time to politically subdue. This perception was soon underwritten by experience.

For the two hundred and thirty years after Albuquerque's disastrous attempt to challenge the Zamorin of Calicut - he had to be carried unconscious to his ship - no European nation attempted any military conquest or tried to bring any ruler under control. In 1739, for instance, the Dutch took on the Raja of Travancore, only to surrender.

It is not surprising to note that one of the first Englishmen who arrived in the country described himself before the Mughal Emperor 'as the smallest particle of sand, John Russel, President of the East India Company with his forehead at command rubbed on the ground.'

All this would dramatically change once total political control was indeed established. As in the case of China, which was seen in the eighteenth century to be more advanced than Europe, but which by the nineteenth century was seen to be abysmally primitive, India too became, after conquest, the recipient of denigrating stereotyping.

By 1800, Indian civilization itself was being described in the most obscene and contemptuous categories, most notably by the likes of William Wilberforce and James Mill. Wilberforce termed the condition of the people of India as 'wretched' and as 'sunk in deep ignorance'.

James Mill was more disdainful: 'The inhabitants of Hindustan rank much lower in the scale of civilization than the nations of Europe', he wrote. 'In truth, the Hindu like the eunuch, excels in the quality of a slave'; he was 'disembling, treacherous, mendacious to an excess which surpasses even the usual measure of uncultivated society', was 'cowardly and unfeeling', and, 'in the physical sense, disgustingly unclean' in person and house. Also to soon become predominant was the idea of Indian culture being infantile and

childish: similar to English descriptions of blacks in America or Africa or indigenous people in South America.

Karl Marx was not far behind in dismissing India's villages as 'semi-barbarous and semi-civilized communities', which 'restricted the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition' and where the peasants lived their 'undignified, stagnant and vegetative life.' He went on to argued that these little communities brought about 'a brutalizing worship of nature exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in the adoration of Kanuman (sic), monkey, and Sabbala, cow.'

These new impressions laid the grounds for the introduction of the Indian educational system, set up after Lord Macaulay's famous 7th March, 1835 Education Minute, which laid down the policy for the use of English and the raising of a generation of clerks. Macaulay denigrated the entire corpus of Indian literature, saying it could be safely disposed of with no loss to humanity. A couple of decades later, in 1853, Charles Trevelyan explained the logic behind the policy more clearly, when he said:

'The only means at our disposal for preventing revolution is to set the natives on a process of European improvement. They will then cease to desire and aim at independence on the old Indian footing. The national activity will be fully and harmlessly employed in acquiring and diffusing European knowledge.'

This is the sum and substance of what we may call today 'the Columbus project': the wholesale insidious propagation of the values of Christianity sans any of the elements of Christian doctrine. Through these means, the Columbus project was soon incorporated by the Hindu community. The most striking consequence was the rapid Christianization of Hinduism itself. Leaders like Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda attempted to reorganize Hinduism to meet the challenge of Christianity: the form of the response was to model Hinduism on the lines as Christianity, with its own set of sacred books, the Vedas and the Gita, missions schools, missionaries and so on, imitation being the sincerest form of flattery.

Thus, not for nothing has the result of the Indian educational system been any less severe than what the policies of

Christianization/enslavement had achieved in the Americas. There it led to the mass annihilation of millions and sent them six feet under the ground or up into smoke. The Indian educational system has likewise succeeded is despatching a larger number of people in India into a similar kind of limbo: their minds crippled, they are also in a sense quite dead, even though, unlike the exterminated Amerindians, they pretend to move about above the ground.

The Debate in North America

The idea that wild men must be tamed and, if that were not possible, then exterminated, was not restricted to the Spanish (Roman Catholic) experience of South America. It drove the white settlers from England during the takeover of North America as well, thus confirming the shared unitary response of Europe to the discovery of the Other.

The royal charters that sanctioned the first journeys out of England used, in fact, practically the same language as the one used by the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs. The charter Henry VII granted to John Cabot and his sons in 1482, for example, licensed the sea-farers to occupy and set up the king's banners and ensigns, '...in any town, city, castle, island or mainland whatsoever, newly found by them', anywhere in the '...eastern, western and northern sea...', belonging to '...heathens and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians.' The charter empowered them '...to conquer, occupy and possess' all such places, the main condition being that they would give to the king '...the fifth part of the whole capital gained...' in every voyage of their enterprise.

A little later, the Englishman, Humphrey Gilbert's letters patent, empowered him to search out remote 'heathen and barbarous' lands not occupied by Christian princes. The locations of these lands were of course properly vague, but the cultural assumptions were plain: such remote lands belonged by right of the True Faith to such Christian princes as would first discover them, and not to the native inhabitants themselves.

Since this assumption was patently unjust, it was never stated outright and a more benign version was offered for a time in its

place: namely, that 'the Christians had as much right to the wilderness lands as did the natives, indeed a greater right if the latter proved unwilling to share with them.'

Thus, in Sir George Peckham's *A true report of the late discoveries*, written shortly after the 1583 exploratory voyage of Gilbert and reporting its experiences, exploration and colonization become Christian callings. The claim is made for the first time that the country discovered by the coasting Gilbert was occupied by savages who had no knowledge of the Christian God.

'Is it not to be lamented, that these poore Pagans, so long living in ignorance and Idolatry, and in sorte, thirsting after christianitye (as may appeare by the relation of such as have travailed in those partes), that our heartes are so hardened, that fewe or none can be found which wil put to theyr helping hands, and applie themselves to the relieving of the miserable and wretched estate of these sillie soules?'

There was therefore only one duty left to Christians in the circumstances: they must relieve the misery of the sufferers. And how would this be accomplished? By the introduction of civilized pursuits to the savages including English settlement and English agriculture. Thereafter, the pagans need no longer languish in the uncleared wilderness.

It is important to observe here that like the Amerindians of South America, so too those living on the eastern seaboard of North America were part of a complex of cultures that had what can only be described as a genius for horticulture. Thanksgiving Day in the United States is an annual commemoration of the debt America owes to Amerindian agriculture's ability to save the first settlers from starvation. The list of crops first domesticated in the Americas by the Amerindians and now staples the world around is extensive, topped of course by maize, potato and tomato, along with pumpkin, peanut and including cassava/manioc, on which a good deal of the continent of Africa today survives.

Surely then, it was not that the Amerindians were not known to practise agriculture but that their agriculture did not proceed in the same way as that of the European - in wholesale clearance of the woodland - the same woodland which had remained a lurking menace within European tradition for centuries. The blinded eye

has never been able to see indigenous agriculture or industry as able technological or scientific products of any sophistication.

Peckham, according to Takaki, outlined two kinds of 'planting' or white settlement in the new lands:

In the first, the Christians would 'ingratiate themselves with the savages by peaceful and gradual means, giving them gaudy trifles, defending them against the raids of supposed cannibal neighbours, teaching them the faith, and reaping the resulting economic benefits.'

The second type of planting would be relief upon 'when the savages, ungrateful for all this, turn against the Christians in an unlawful attempt to dislodge them from their justly won portion of the New World.' Once this happened, advised Peckham, 'there is no bar but in stout assemblies, the Christians may issue out, and by strong hand pursue their enemies, subdue them, take possession of their Towns, Cities or Villages (and in avoiding murderous tyranny) to use the law of arms, as in like case among all nations at this day is used.... '

It is quite obvious that what Peckham meant was there could be in effect only one type of planting: the second envisioned as the consequence of the inevitable failure of the first. Savages being what they were, were bound to resist civilization and Christianity. This was precisely the logic of the Spanish *Requerimiento*, appearing now in the service of another nation of the West under a different label.

But Peckham was merely the first of a long line of propagandists to provide an English version of the drive to subdue and civilize the savage world. Cotton Mather, Puritan historian, was equally ready to announce that his New Englanders are, 'A People of God settled in those lands which were once the Devil's Territories; and it may easily be supposed that the Devil was exceedingly disturbed, when he perceived such a People here accomplishing the Promise of old made unto our Blessed Jesus, That He should have the Utmost parts of the Earth for his Possession.' Thus a link was formed between the devil and economic backwardness.

Albert Gentili, regius professor of civil law at the University of Oxford argued that war against Amerindians was justified because they 'practised abominable lewdness' and indulged in

activities contrary to human nature.

Another English settler, Sir William Johnson, explained it was necessary 'to civilize the savages before they can be converted to Christianity and that in order to make them Christians, they must first be made Men.' The natural slave, and the natural child, were conditional men: they could not be left in their state of nature, acting contrary to natural law. That was an offence to the Christian conscience. Once that had been changed, they could be given, or would be ready to receive, the true benefit of civilization and its culmination, Christianity.

As in the case of the Amerindians of South America, the abominable treatment of the blacks and of the Indians in North America also brought forth a corresponding debate concerning the status of these coloured barbarians.

According to Takaki, the principal anxiety facing North America's leaders, after they had cut themselves off from the king of England was how men in the republic might govern themselves as there would be no father or king to restrain their passions. The answer for that problem lay in self-control. Self-control depended upon whether or not a man had virtue. It was quite obvious to the white settlers that both blacks and Indians could not be associated with virtue.

Takaki has shown how a republican ideology rooted in the Protestant ethic was promoted by intellectual and political leaders as a strategy to domesticate and discipline the emotional part of the white settlers and to set themselves even further apart from the blacks and Indians, both latter groups being unmistakeably associated with the 'instinctual life'. A diversified society with whites, blacks and Indians was readily seen as a danger to a republican society because these groups lived too close to nature and to the instinctual life.

Thus one writer described the Negroes as cruel and cunning, who ate like 'absolute brutes' and 'believed in the most gross idolatry.' The same writer went on to note: 'Aristotle...declared that slaves could not have virtue, but he knew not any who were so utterly devoid of any semblance of virtue as are the Africans; whose understandings are generally shallow, and their hearts cruel, vindictive, stubborn, base and wicked.'

Likewise the Indians were seen as creatures of passion, wild and primitive, lacking the control and inclination to labour which whites believed were necessary if civilization had to advance. Just as Chanca had described the Amerindians in South America as 'so like animals', the North American view now described them as 'animals, vulgarly called Indians'. In 1622, when the Powhatans rose against the British, they were immediately described as a 'perfidious and inhumane people', 'cruel beasts' with 'a more natural brutishness than beasts'. Like Shakespeare's Caliban, they were not masters of their natural life. They could therefore not be Republicans. To be a Republican, reason had to be in command. Whites were naturally associated with rationality or mind (like the Greeks, of course) whereas people of colour were associated with the body. Thus just as mind was authority over the other parts of the self, so whites were raised above blacks and Indians.

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, retained two views of the Indian: that he could be civilized and assimilated; if not, removed, possibly exterminated. As Takaki has scrupulously documented, this view would repeat itself time and again. For Jefferson, progress meant advance from savagery to pastoral and urban civilization, from past to present: the Indian was identified with nature, the frontier West and the past, and the past had to be dominated.

In addition, according to Jefferson, black intelligence was inferior and Indian intelligence was undeveloped. Therefore both lacked possibilities of self-control that civilized men must have. Blacks in fact seemed unable to develop beyond childhood. Wrote another commentator of the time: 'The same power that has given him a black skin with less weight in volume of brain has given us a white skin, with greater volume of brain and intellect.' Thus whites saw the black 'child/savage' in counterpoint to their own self-image, the antithesis of themselves and of what they valued: the black lacked 'incentive to industry', moral restraint, the drive for accumulation and control over the animal part of himself.

The problem, however, was that while the blacks did not own anything, the Indians (like the Amerindians in South America) did. So, the same argument that the conquistadors raised in south America was given another run here. The Indians were savages.

'What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns and prosperous farms...filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?' Children of the forests, the Indians did not cultivate the land. How could they make claims on tracts on which they had neither dwelt or made improvements? (In 1978, an Indian Prime Minister made an almost identical statement regarding the rights of India's tribals in the forests. They were occupying, he said, too much of space).

The Government, Jefferson told Andrew Jackson in 1803, must keep agents among the Indians to lead them to agriculture and to advise them to sell their 'useless' extensive forests in order to obtain money and purchase clothes and comforts from federal trading houses. They would naturally be subject to extermination if they resisted.

Later, the whites professed to be distressed that the Indians were with them for two centuries and showed no improvement. 'Like the bear, and deer, and buffalo of his own forests, an Indian lives as his father lived, and dies as his father died. He never attempts to imitate the arts of his civilized neighbours. His life passes away in a succession of listless indolence, and of vigorous exertion to provide for his animal wants, or to gratify his baleful passions. Efforts...have not been wanting to teach and reclaim him. But he is perhaps destined to disappear with the forests....'

The Indian historian Dharampal has noted that an approximate idea of the holocaust in both South and North America during the past five hundred years can be had from the fact that the estimated populations in these 'new lands' prior to 'discovery' were in the region of 90-112 million. The holocausts are well documented in hundreds of books.

Millions of Indians were either exterminated or removed from their homes. For instance, Jackson's policy of removing all Amerindians west of the Mississippi was principally aimed at removing the Five Civilized Nations as they were called - Cherokee, Creeks, Choctaws, Seminoles and Chicksaw, those very peoples who had most openly accepted accommodation to white civilization and its manners. It was precisely this that had made their lands so attractive to westward moving white settlers. Takaki records

how the Indians were removed from their homes in the South and driven west of the Mississippi river, where due to violence, disease, starvation, dangerous travel conditions, and harsh winter weather, almost one-third of them perished. By 1844, the South had become a white man's country.

Takaki also records how after the ratification of the fraudulent Treaty of New Echota, thousands of white intruders moved into Cherokee territory, seized farms and cultivated lands, forcing out and often murdering the inhabitants. When the Cherokee still refused to recognize the treaty and leave their territory, the federal government finally ordered the army to round up 15,000 of them. Placed in detention camps and then marched west beyond the Mississippi in the dead of winter, more than 4,000 Cherokees died on the Trail of Tears.

Thus did the Europeans destroy whole ways of life in the name of civilization. It is ironic that the improvement of the so-called savage races was sought to be achieved through nothing less than the deeper savagery of Christian civilization infected with a relentless virulence that one can only associate with a galloping cancer.

It is not difficult to understand why US Senator Thomas Hart Benton in the early nineteenth century saw no particular difficulty in resuming the vocabularies and design of Columbus: the children of Adam, proclaimed the Senator, were completing the circumambulation of the globe by marching across America from the east coast to the west upto the Pacific Ocean 'in sight of the eastern shore of that Asia in which their first parents were originally planted.'

As Benton explained to Congress in 1846, the arrival of the white race on the west coast would benefit mankind. On the other side was the yellow race which 'must receive an impression from the superior race whenever they come into contact.' Benton claimed that the white race alone had received the divine command 'to subdue and replenish the earth,' for it was the only race which searched for new and distant lands.

The theory now was that as the white race made their restless movements from western Asia they developed religion, art, science, destroying savagery and savages as they advanced civiliza-

tion. About the disappearance of the Indians from the Atlantic coast, he noted that one could not murmur against what appeared to be the effect of divine law. The white race was to take the ascendant and elevate and improve the yellow race from its torpidity.

Thereafter, American expansion set itself 'on the road to India', ousting the Spanish from the Philippines and began to penetrate the markets of Asia. The purveyors of American aggression and destructiveness preached the gospel of the strenuous life. The takeover of the Far East would result from decadent conditions there and the lack of Asian power to resist encroachments from a more virile nation.

This new version of the Columbian design was thus directed to the domination of the undeveloped areas. This time, these contained primitive Filipinos and savage Chinese. It was civilized men who required and deserved more territory. Incompetent races were destined to be destroyed; inferior ones had fallen back and disappeared before the persistent impact of the superior.

The Columbus principle had evolved to new heights. It pronounced now that no people had a natural right to land: that right depended upon, first, physical fitness; and second, the ability to utilize the land and see that its resources were not left idle. Lands inhabited by Indians were lying in waste, which contravened the very purpose of human life. It was the final destiny of civilized men to control all those areas of the world which still remained in the possession of savages and to bring the land and its resources into productive use for the general good of the world. Savagery whether in America or Asia must yield to civilization.

The notion that the Amerindians had a passive (or harmonious) outlook on the land was itself part of the mythology invented to eliminate them. There is ample evidence from diverse culture areas of the Americas that the Amerindians had both changed and shaped the natural environment over time. But the notion that such societies were in essence functions of the natural world was a useful construction of the Great Lie itself. For being so, the Amerindian was unable to carry out the civilized/civic duty to master the natural environment and subordinate it to human design and domination. This became merely another providential

proof of his lack of proper humanity and civilization. The Amerindian was bound to vanish because he was a more fragile breed, living in nature, not advanced and superior and dominant over nature, like western man, a proof of his Otherness as a different kind of human being.

Nothing has really changed from the days Columbus first saw the Arawak and dreamed of enslaving them for what he claimed was their own good. The only difference between 1492 and now is that the reach of the blinded eye has now become global.

* * *

A related aspect of this devastating impact of Columbus' savage civilization needs now to be highlighted separately. This concerns the European encounter with the wilderness, the transformation and despoliation of nature outside Europe. The scale of the barbarism, however, is so large it might be initially difficult to grasp and comprehend, but its effects bind us every day and there is no promise of an end in sight.

As Turner describes it, the natural endowments of the New World were thunderous: 'The land often announced itself with a heavy scent miles out into the ocean, and the coasting whites with their nostrils full of salt and the sour odors of confinement recorded their delight with the odor of forests and verges of bloom, the smell of cedars, the large beds of floating flowers, a rich riot of colour and sound, of game and luxuriant vegetation.'

But, just as the initial reaction to the innocence of the Amerindian was soon replaced by implacable hostility and rage in the invading conquistadors, a similar pattern of reactions emerged in their dealings with the natural environment. Colonization meant freeing the soil's fertility for commerce. This involved the evacuation and elimination of whatever stood on the soil at the moment.

It is perhaps ironic that Christopher Columbus' own father-in-law set the first example when he imported rabbits into the Madeiras. The rabbits soon left the entire vegetation in tatters. The principal island of the Madeiras was colonized likewise after it was claimed by Portugal in 1419: the colonizers set the completely forested island to flame. It burned for seven years.

This was all mere prelude: all the vast new areas and lands being occupied post-1492 would soon be stripped, as the invaders would attempt to transform the environments in which they found themselves into recognizable counterparts of their homelands. They imported here their old fears of the wilderness and cleared much of the landscape with a driven passion. 'As long as we keep ourselves busy tilling the earth, there is no fear of any of us becoming wild.'

Comments Turner: 'Haunted by these fears, driven by their divisions, they slashed and hacked at the wilderness they saw so that within three centuries of Cortes's penetration of the mainland a world millions of years in the making vanished into the voracious, insatiable maw of an alien civilization.'

The forests were the first to lose their rights. Allowing them to exist meant abandoning them to 'hopeless sterility'. They must give way to the march of civilization and improvement.

In the Mississippi Valley, for instance, twenty-five million forest acres a year including stands of cypress and oak, were destroyed and the wildlife exterminated. The list of fauna exterminated and placed on the endangered list is long. The rule of thumb was very often simply this: if something had no commercial utility for man, it could be extinguished. But equally often, there were shrewd calculations behind provoking the ecological catastrophe. The white settlers quickly realized that altering the natural environment, not just the forests, but also the buffalo, would also help eradicate the Amerindian who depended on the buffalo for his survival.

Wrote Jefferson: 'The laws [of Virginia] have also descended to the preservation and improvement of the races of useful animals, such as horses, cattle, deer; to the extirpation of those which are noxious, as wolves, squirrels, crows, blackbirds; and to the guarding of our citizens against infectious disorders, by obliging suspected vessels coming into the state, to perform quarantine, and by regulating the conduct of persons having such disorders within the state.'

Turner poetically related the frantic spoliation, waste and destruction to the early memory of the Israelites, to ' that sense so powerfully urged in Old Testament writ of dark chaos rolled back

to the edges of lucid creation, where it crouches waiting to engulf the cleared spaces of human endeavour as the desert sands of the Near East seemed waiting always to sweep again over cultivated lands too long neglected. Order was the cleared and cultivated field or the carefully tended garden, nature made better by man, and it was the obligation of the Christian to bring this order to places lacking in it. On it then might one hope for prosperity.'

Instead, that very same order has turned into a major source of the planet's peril as we belatedly and with horror uncover its bewildering impact on the planet's diverse plant and animal life.

. . .

Christopher Columbus has finally arrived at the world of the 1990s to establish his seemingly unchallenged command over it. A plethora of global institutions busy themselves in continuing and deepening his search of the fabled Indies. He looked for gold and spices; they look for profits in the pursuit of which they stimulate mindless and endless change. Both are related to the emptiness within and the tastelessness of ordinary life without.

The ship of the west, still driven now by its own traumas and fears, founders rudderless in a narcissitic aggression, not knowing why it has done what it did, why it continues restless across the globe, fiercely upsetting the lives of millions of people whether they wish it or not.

The fundamental question - why Columbus had to leave his shores and impose himself on the rest of humankind - has remained unanswered to this day. It is not answered because, perhaps, there is no answer. To still the cauldron of incessant activity would expose the pointlessness of the effort in all its dimensions.

In the meanwhile, development has replaced the *encomienda* and the civilizing mission within the South. To sustain the new and, for many, alien principle of progress, that has become today its main force, the sanctity of both nature and human nature were given up somewhere along the way. This became possible once the theories of nature were finally sundered from the Judaeo-Christian cosmology and the idea of transcendence that lay at its heart, stimulating the ambition of secularizing the every day world and its knowledge.

The secularization thrust did not merely de-sacralize nature to lay the basis for today's environmental crisis; it also underwrote later the Hobbesian vision of human sociality, to open up the possibility of freeing public life of all inner checks - psychological and cultural - on human behaviour, and thus leaving public ethics entirely dependent upon an elaborate, institutionalized reward-punishment system run by the new emerging nation-states.

The separation of Church and State in western Christendom was only an outer manifestation of this ambition. It might have had some justification in the European context where the Church had often behaved like a venal political machine. But it was to turn into a devastating innovation in the Americas, in Africa and Asia, particularly among the American Indians and African tribes and in the old Asian cultures where societies were organized around their religions: here, the newly imposed principle of secularism broke the continuities between public norms and private ethics.

For a while though, people still continued to be guided and constrained by the cultural and religious norms they had inherited through their traditions but, gradually, the logic of a secularized, amoral, culturally rootless, public life began to spread out from the narrow sphere of the State, where it already sometimes enjoyed *de facto* ascendancy even when the formal separatism of religion and politics had not taken place. No sphere of public and private life was, after a while, exempt from its fatal attractions.

Even the 'natural' biopsychological aspects of human life - child rearing, sex and love, age care and everyday health - were colonized by the imperial principle of secularism. They were no longer left to culture; they became more and more the domain of modern science and, through it, the secularized principles of western knowledge systems and lifestyle. Public life, too, became a sphere of 'mature' *realpolitik* with all the political immorality one associates with it nowadays.

Simultaneously, the devaluation of the sacred that underpinned the principle of secularism helped to destroy the age-old traditions of tolerance of the other - or, at least, the restraints on the intolerance of the other - that checked, however imperfectly, inter-tribal, inter-religious and inter-societal conflicts at the level of ordinary life. Such responsibilities were now slowly handed over to the secular apparatus of the state and to its coercive machinery.

As a result, the nature of the violence involved in such conflicts between communities itself became increasingly more secular. Violence born of anger or hatred - but nevertheless often tinged with moral fervour, however distasteful - and, ritualized violence of the kind which granted a minimum dignity to the victims, were both gradually substituted by dispassionate, amoral, 'banal' violence based on mechanical, fully secular cost calculations. The spirit of modern science and of unalloyed self-interest now coloured collective violence too.

The Columbus Within

Europe's imposition of itself on the 'New World' (and thereafter, on the known worlds of Africa and Asia) unleashed a myriad cultural and psychological forces, many of them not yet fully manifest, even after 500 years. We have tried to identify some of them here with mixed success. Three of these forces have become extremely crucial in the period in which European culture, through the instruments of conquest, imperialism, colonialism and now, development, has attempted to absolutize and globalize itself.

The first of these forces is represented by those who wished to replace the native character of the American Indians 'with European modes of thinking and feeling' in order to get rid of their 'unpredictable native ones': we have seen, for instance, how Lord Macaulay inaugurated such a substitution through his Education Minute in colonial India, the original destination of Columbus' voyage.

The program was unambiguously clear: the culture of the Other, largely 'unpredictable', and therefore difficult to bring under control or surveillance, had to be engineered to produce institutions and personalities that would be familiar, predictable and controllable to Europe. Once retooled, such personalities would remain, according to Macaulay, 'natives only in their looks';

they would be otherwise European in their manners, habits of mind and even bare impulses.

This gargantuan exercise in social engineering has now become the principal preoccupation of every repressive non-western regime operating within the European concept of the nation-state, and infected with the combined missions of development and scientific rationality. State formation, development, modernization in general, have now become routine excuses for the abridgement of civil liberties and for state violence. In this project, they have naturally found enthusiastic supporters among the western nation-states.

In fact, such regimes have done one better. While in pre-modern Europe the responsibility of the nation-states remained confined mainly to issues like national security and economic prosperity, in the 'savage' world the nation-state has, in addition, taken on the white man's burden; which is to drag entire populations out of their 'superstitious', 'irrational', 'unscientific' and 'retrogressive' life ways and have them incorporated within the cultural norms of the modern West.

That takes us to an examination of the second of the forces we wrote of earlier: much before the likes of H.G. Wells popularized the concept of time-travel through their science fiction and much before particle physics popularized the concept of the inter-translatability of space and time in nature, the New World provided Europe a unique and unprecedented cultural play with its own and the Other's pasts, present and futures. In this play, Europe's past was systematically represented as the present of the non-European world. What Europe and the rest of the modern West had once been in their pre-modern incarnations, now only the Other was reportedly backward enough to remain mired in. The equation between the savage and the child was established as the final justification for the civilizing mission of the colonial and post-colonial West.

Similarly, Europe's present was re-written as the future of the Other. What the West was, the new theory of progress went, the Other could now become in the future, provided they were rational and mature enough to know their own good and internalize Western values and conventions. That parts of the Other were to show enough 'maturity' to internalize the West in its entirety gave

further confidence to the carriers of the culture of Christopher Columbus and the oculus mundi he installed.

In both forms of time travel, the West has obviously remained the measure of everything valuable culturally and psychologically. In fact, it has become the expert to the rest of the world in the latter's alleged childhood. The West now presumably understands the rest of the world better than the rest themselves do, for the rest only live in their present, whereas the West has lived in that present (it being the West's past) and transcended it. The West also knows the Other's future better than the Other itself does, for the Other has still to enter that future, whereas the West is at the moment living out that future.

As we have already noted, chroniclers of the New World characterized the Amerindians as being subject to the 'tyranny of themselves'. The logic of that reading of the savage permeates all aspects of the West's dealings with the rest of the world as well as the way in which westernized third world elites themselves deal with their own people. The savage as a natural child and the savage as a natural slave are images that have over the last two hundred years acquired even greater potency and applicability than they had in fifteenth century Europe with the institution of *encomienda*. William Johnson claimed, the reader may remember, that to civilize the savage one had to first Christianize them, but to Christianize them one had to first turn them into 'men'. That project continues with as much enthusiasm today under the reportedly benign tutelage of the northern states and their corporate structures including the multilateral development banks, as it does under the numerous despots of the South.

And now, to the third force. We have pointed out that till the nineteenth century, the terms 'civilization' and 'culture' were always used in the singular. The idea of chosenness - unlike A. K. Coomaraswamy's use of the word 'tradition' in the singular, by which he meant all non-modern traditions, including the western - has been used to systematically subvert and marginalise all modes of dissent that have not conformed to the idea of dissent permitted by the Global Centre. Nothing has ensured the stability of the present global order, organised around Europe's *oculus mundi*, more faithfully than this management of dissent. As the

citadels of in-house dissent have collapsed one after another in the northern theatre (the Marxist-Leninist project being the last in the series), not only has the mainstream global culture acquired a greater sense of permanence and omnipotence, it has become more dismissive of dissent that refuses to articulate itself in the language of the mainstream - that looks to it chaotic, uncontrollable, childish, disorganized, and irrational.

Together these forces, by having made Europeanization into an aggressive, powerful and driven enterprise in the non-European world, have turned Christopher Columbus himself into an in-house cultural presence in every other civilization today. Columbus is no longer out there in history, a cultural hero of the West who has to be applauded, criticized or even jettisoned in the five hundredth year of his grand success. He must also be confronted *within* even by those who have apparently escaped the West's loving embrace and have had nothing to do with the European repertoire Columbus carried with him outside Europe's borders. All traditional peoples and world-views have to wrestle with the legacy of 1492 and its consequences. There is no going back to what is native and traditional because that itself has changed and been mutilated by 500 years of domination and dislocation.

It would seem then that Christopher Columbus has finally triumphed. After five hundred years of marauding vandalism and colonialism, through two hundred years of education, development and modernization, he has arranged to clone himself successfully within the savage world. For this reason, he probably does not have to be at the centre of the world stage any more. He might even willingly be the butt of criticism, wit and sarcasm the world over, including among his erstwhile admirers. The West may not even have to keep him alive as a symbol of victory or self-criticism. The rest of the world can do so on its own.

Yet, everything said, this hopefully is not the whole picture. The non-western world still remains fundamentally unable to disown its own cultural self entirely, even if it wishes to. Its version of the *oculus mundi* cannot but be inauthentic and occasionally comic. In that inauthenticity and comicness, there has always been another play possible, always the possibility of a failure to live upto the expectations of the Global Centre. The play and the failure offer

an escape route in an otherwise totalizing situation. In many societies of the South, such everyday forms of dissent, non-cooperation and resistance are rendered possible by imperfect modernization of the economy and backed by the persistence of community life and traditions, in defiance of the global forces of homogenization.

Neither the play nor the escape route is available to Europe. Nor is either available even to those strands of dissent within it that seek today to disown the Columbian world image and its heritage. The repression of the Other within the West has been far more ruthless and complete. The near-total breakdown of community life, brought about by massification, the efficient atomization of the individual, and the full-scale marketisation of a kind that ultimately colours all dissent and defiance of dominant social trends - all render the western intellectual tradition a nearly foolproof monocultural strain. The dissenting civilizational streams within the West have remained subordinate, marginalized and so underused as to become almost vestigial in the consciousness of its members. They have only one option left today: they can only survive outside the West - in the surviving cultural pluralities of the Other and, strangely enough, perhaps even in the acquired or imported biculturality of those exposed to the West. For if the West has had a theory of the Other, the Other too has now developed its own theories of the West.

The events of 1492 therefore cannot be merely a concern of Europe alone nor simply a non-western predicament. They constitute a shared memory, tragic but to the extent it is shared, a memory that could serve as a base line for pluralizing and humanizing our futures. Only when that possibility is explored, its implications honestly acknowledged, can we recover the lost reality of all the world's peoples. Only then can we uncover what has been so far invisible within the common knowledge pool around the globe.

The point of release is to go back to 1492 in a sense and to rediscover the underside of the world-view that Europe established centre-stage. Within one lifetime, even by the standards of Columbus' day, that same world-view went on to encompass the globe. From 1492 to 1992, we are not dealing with change, rupture and

difference but rather with suppression, forgetting and deliberate avoidance of realities, cultural as well as psychological. We are dealing with the deformed sight allowed to a blinded eye.

The eye of the West, *oculus mundi*, the civilization that arose by straddling the Atlantic space opened up by Columbus, was blind when it turned to observe what was not European or Western. When it eventually focussed its sights on the Other, it did so blinded by its own perceptions and previsions. It not merely helped falsify the Other, but in fact, invented it out of Europe's own inner demons -its fears, anxieties and disowned self.

Once the Other had been reborn thus in such grossly mutilated form within Europe's imagination, the latter proceeded to administer and interact with them as if they were nothing more than what it perceived.

For instance, British administration in India was shaped by antiquarian studies rooted in the conventions of Otherness. The form of the British Raj retained its intellectual debt to the old medieval categories, and to the likes of James Mill who studied and speculated through these ideas. It proceeded to deal with real Indians as if they were part of a static, inflexible tradition, a tradition that could have no autonomous impulse to change. All that could cause or create change had to come from the West, not from the living traditions of the people who inhabited the land mass called India.

This conception of the nature of tradition lives on within India and practically all other societies even today. It has been diffused into the Other's concept of their self by the most enduring legacy of 1492, the colonization of the self, the implanting of Columbus within. It is implicit in the modern educational apparatus, the bureaucratic structure of the state, the axioms of which are encoded with and are products of ideas of Otherness. So-called independent nation-states of the non-western world now hunger after this imported education to acquire 'mastery' over their own problems and to imbibe deeper ignorance of their autonomous past. The Other may only desire and acquire 'good and useful' knowledge by unknowing themselves completely.

In the modern world, thus, the Other are now confronted by a dual incomprehensibility: the difference between the West and

their actual self; the difference between their actual self and the invented self Europe bequeathed them. The battle to overturn colonial imposition, with its political and social controls, and the idea of the Other that legitimated and sustained that imposition, have dislocated all non-European civilizations within themselves.

The real achievement of the blinded gaze of *oculus mundi* is that even today all negotiation with Western civilization must be carried out through the West's conventions. To secure amendment or concession, real people have to act either as if they were the Other invented by Europe or as if they have become part of the West. So seemingly complete is this triumph that today the Other too negotiates with its real self through the conventions of Western civilization.

Thus the future allows the Other the same two false choices that Columbus first proffered his 'Indians' in 1492: enslavement or conversion. The only progress we seem to have made in 500 years is that today the Other have the option to choose between an 'authenticity' constructed by Columbus and his civilization or to live on as a parody of their former selves. Nothing more is permissible or possible within the current debate on the new world order simply because it remains within the confines of the Columbian politics of consciousness.

If then, in 1492 *oculus mundi* turned the blind gaze of Europe's history to the unknown and made it knowable by enforcing a Great Lie, in 1992, all histories are corrupted by that Lie. So when we are asked for a simple vote for or against Columbus, for Columbus the hero or against Columbus the villain, the exercise will serve only to validate the constitution of the Great Lie without questioning the perversion of reality it authors.

In addition, we must note that the Columbian legacy has been reformulated many times over the last five hundred years to suppress and distance uncomfortable realities from the manifest destiny of dominant ideas. Columbus the vainglorious villain, the despoiler and destroyer, the imperialist par excellence, is not a latter-day discovery. He was recognized as such even by many of his contemporaries. His anti-eminence in the 1990s could be just another reformulation, just another angled perspective of *oculus mundi* and as much implicated in the events of 1492. It appears that

the same subtle manipulation of knowledge and ignorance is already at work in the quincentennial as in the heady days of Columbus.

The task we face then is not 'being nice to Amerindians', a people we do not even have any name for, no way of referring to, except one authored by the Great Lie. Nor is it being nasty to Columbus and all he stands for. The opportunity to turn him into a scapegoat has been given to us as an easy option and as a compensation for conformity in other crucial sectors of life.

The main task for us then is to render the west's *oculus mundi*, this eye of the world, visible in all its deformation so that people everywhere can see themselves clearly once again.

The European landfall in the Americas is the starting point of a debate in which all the peoples of the world willy-nilly now find their identity. It is the primal moment of a new and unprecedented global system of power and knowledge that renders plurality, diversity and culture-to-culture dialogue, conversation and exchange a practically insurmountable enterprise in today's world. The dilemma confronts the Muslim, the Hindu, the African, the Chinese and the Japanese, the Amerindian and the European as well as the citizen of the United States of America.

The discovery that remains to be made five hundred years on is how little we can know about ourselves, whoever we are, because of the triumph of ignorance Columbus made possible. All the questions, all the terms of the debate about human nature and human diversity, its causes and effects, its consequences and implications reach back to the events of October 12, 1492. That watershed established not only what it is to be modern, but what it is to be the Other, not European, distinct from the West.

Indeed, the condemnation of Columbus in 1992 is insufficient to give the Other, in all its diversity, an autonomous existence in the modern world. Nor can it liberate the West to engage in a new way with the Other. The encounter with reality - and even more important - with the Other - is still waiting to take place. We can only break out of this vicious circle and liberate political discourse by attempting to acknowledge the blindness that struck the eye of Europe and crippled its vision; by standing apart from the spreading tentacles of ways of thinking and seeing that are part of the

omnipresent corpus of western interpretation. We can begin by questioning all received history which has been determined by *oculus mundi*. We must admit the falsity of the Other and consign everything built on this mythology to the dustbin of history.

In this enterprise, the Columbus within may be an even greater obstruction than the Columbus without. His science, his economics, his attitudes towards nature, his perceptions of gender and health, his outlook on the Other and their languages have struck deep roots within us. Pulling out these institutions by the roots must cause great pain, but there is no compelling reason why these fundamental tasks must remain undone.

In this gigantic and vast re-making of a new world, the Other have a major role. It is only they who are in a position to offer the world the tools to cut and think through the intellectual and cultural rubbish the past has accumulated in the present. It is their experience of wrestling with their own ambiguous identity that contains the kernels of resistance and defiance on which a genuine plural future can be created. The powerful seldom contemplate sharing their world with the powerless - until the case for change has become an unavoidable practical necessity. One requires therefore, in addition to a moral case, a practical framework to promote actual change.

The Other must learn to talk within itself, through its own language; for this, it must initiate a contemporary, unapologetic discourse concerning itself, unmediated through the concepts and categories imbibed in the epoch of Christopher Columbus. This involves re-learning the flexibility and dynamics of its own traditions and history.

However, a word of caution here. The idealization of traditional values and ethics often makes modern bearers of their vestige believe they no longer need to think, that simply because they assume they have the ethics which makes them all right, this will sanctify everything they do, so long as they themselves choose to do it. The lack of thought and the facile assumption of superior ecological values can effortlessly even allow them to embrace the content and form of the modern world.

Thus the Islamic Republic of Iran can resume the Shah's drive to become a nuclear power, its Islamic orthodoxy obviating any

need to engage in a soul searching debate over the Islamic acceptability of nuclear power *per se*. Everything is reduced to merely a question of appropriating control over a technology of power that its potential enemies already possess on the grounds than when it is in Islamic hands, all will be well. Unfortunately, planet earth is unable to distinguish between Islamic radioactive leaks and accidents any more than it could between communist or capitalist ones. Only when the Other's thought and actions are grounded in its own universe can it hope to author its own post-modern reality.

This new discourse may require a fresh definition of our institutions, especially in the area of knowledge generation and transmission. Resistance and defiance may involve recasting the educational structures of the Third World for building intellectual networks that inter-relate the South. They will revive a plethora of languages outside the Western imperium, each with its own vocabularies and concepts. Since they will all be informed by a common, though diverse, inheritance of dislocation and domination, they must come together to make culture-to-culture discourse a reality, to establish a new plural future through cross-cultural dialogues.

It may also involve, one, learning to appreciate the integrity of cultures and civilizations as ongoing entities, bodies of interrelated beliefs, values and practices that are meaningless except as coherent wholes; and, two, appreciating that a multi-civilizational future is not a recipe for conflict, mutual incomprehensibility or chaos, but the means to a new multiverse of possibilities, to a more sustainable and just future, in social, political, economic and environmental terms.

The challenge of 1992 and hereafter is to recover our plural pasts, and through them our plural futures; to resume our numerous histories, metahistories and mythographies, all diverse and equally valid ways of reconstructing the past, constructing the present and responding to events and ideas everywhere. It is the only means to reclaim the debates silenced by Columbus' success. And to survive.

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THE BLINDED EYE
500 Years of Christopher Columbus

On 12th October, 1492, 500 years ago, Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas, inaugurating their political conquest. Six years later, in 1498, Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut in south India, commencing what Indian historian K M Panikkar has dubbed 'the Vasco-da-Gama epoch'.

The consequences of these voyages proved to be exceedingly traumatic for the rest of the non-European world: they led to the extermination of millions of people in south and north America and to the forceful occupation of their lands; they disrupted, through the slave trade, the lives of millions of people on the continent of Africa; and through the acts of plunder associated with colonialization, they invented large scale poverty and misery in India and China.

Unlike other writers, the authors of this remarkable book do not blame Columbus for what he and his successors did. They suggest that Columbus was a man of his times, driven by fairly conventional ideas. Like many of his compatriots in the Middle Ages, he believed, for instance, that India was the home of dog-headed people and that the Garden of Eden lay in the East. They argue instead that Columbus is today being made into a scapegoat for crimes against people and environment that are better laid at the door of European civilization itself. Through a dramatic investigation of the fears through which the Greeks and Romans looked at those outside their frontiers, and an examination of the ideological maps, symbols and institutions through which medieval Christian Europe operated, they conclude that the tragedy, when it came, was inevitable.

When Columbus did not find the monstrous races on the islands he disembarked, he invented them. He dubbed the inhabitants he encountered on the islands 'cannibals', so he could claim they were inimical to Christianity and proceed to enslave or exterminate them. 500 years later, through the idea of 'development', his successors in the West and his clones in the ex-colonialized countries continue his enterprise of dubbing people inferior, ignorant, inefficient, lazy, undeveloped, superstitious, so that they can continue to intervene in their lives and play havoc with their cultures, religion or economy.

The Blinded Eye is the world's first post-Columbian manifesto. It is also the first major collaborative effort between Indian and Pakistani thinkers. The result is a devastating critique of development ('the Columbus within') and an exhaustive analysis of occidentosis, 'the plague of the West'.

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